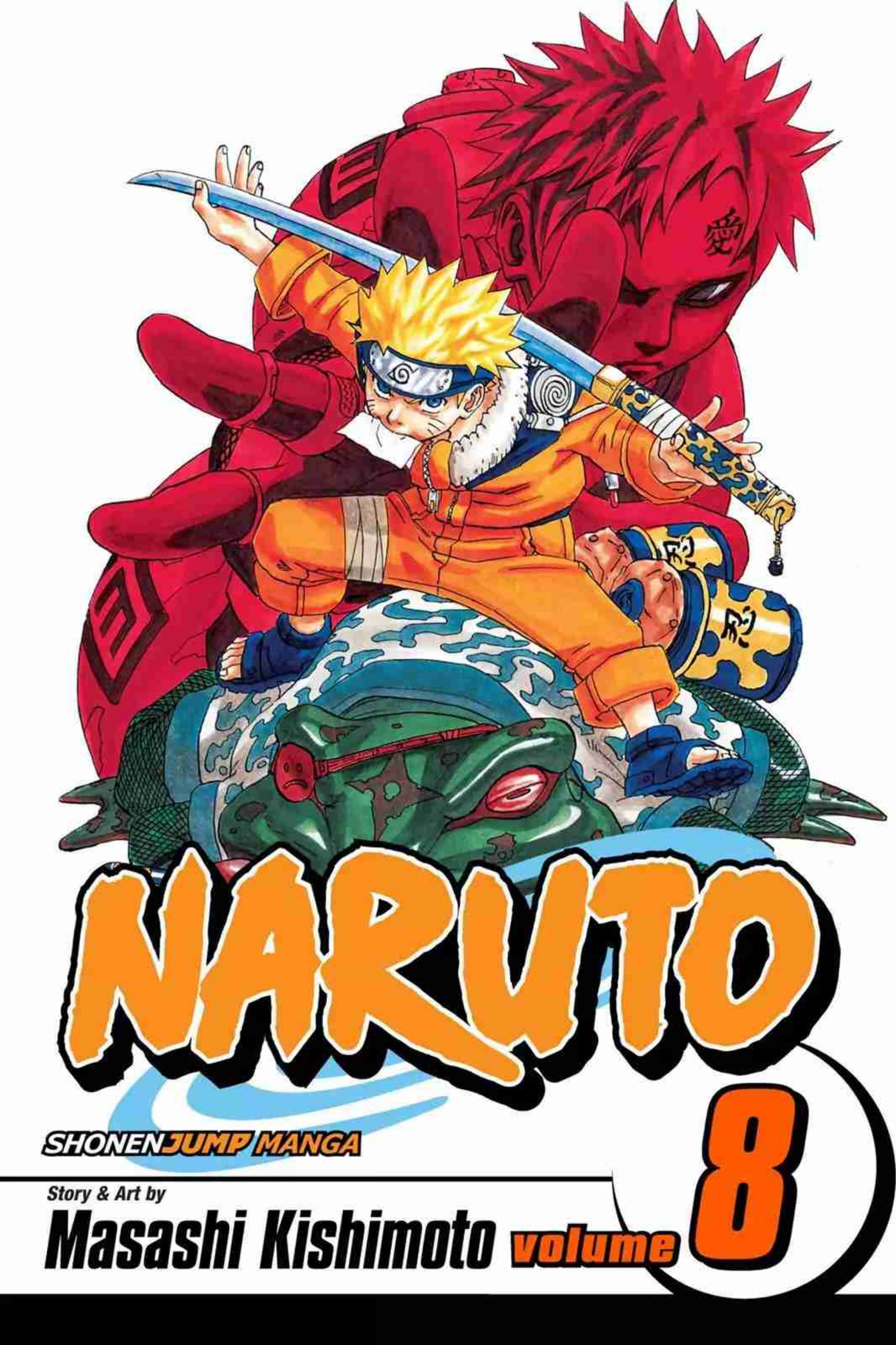

Story & Art by

Masashi Kishimoto volume

It's been about 2 years since ***Naruto*** began running in ***Weekly Shonen Jump***... and I haven't been back to my parents' house once! While I've been away from home, they've totally remodeled the place, and apparently there's not even a trace left of my shabby, memory-filled room. When I heard that, I got a little sad... Time just keeps flowing by...

—*Masashi Kishimoto, 2001*

Author/artist Masashi Kishimoto was born in 1974 in rural Okayama Prefecture, Japan. After spending time in art college, he won the Hop Step Award for new manga artists with his manga **Karakuri** (Mechanism). Kishimoto decided to base his next story on traditional Japanese culture. His first version of **Naruto**, drawn in 1997, was a one-shot story about fox spirits; his final version, which debuted in **Weekly Shonen Jump** in 1999, quickly became the most popular ninja manga in Japan.

NARUTO VOL. 8
SHONEN JUMP Manga Edition

This graphic novel contains material that was originally published in English in **SHONEN JUMP** #31–35.

STORY AND ART BY MASASHI KISHIMOTO

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PARENTAL ADVISORY
NARUTO is rated T for Teen and is recommended for ages 13 and up. This volume contains realistic & fantasy violence.

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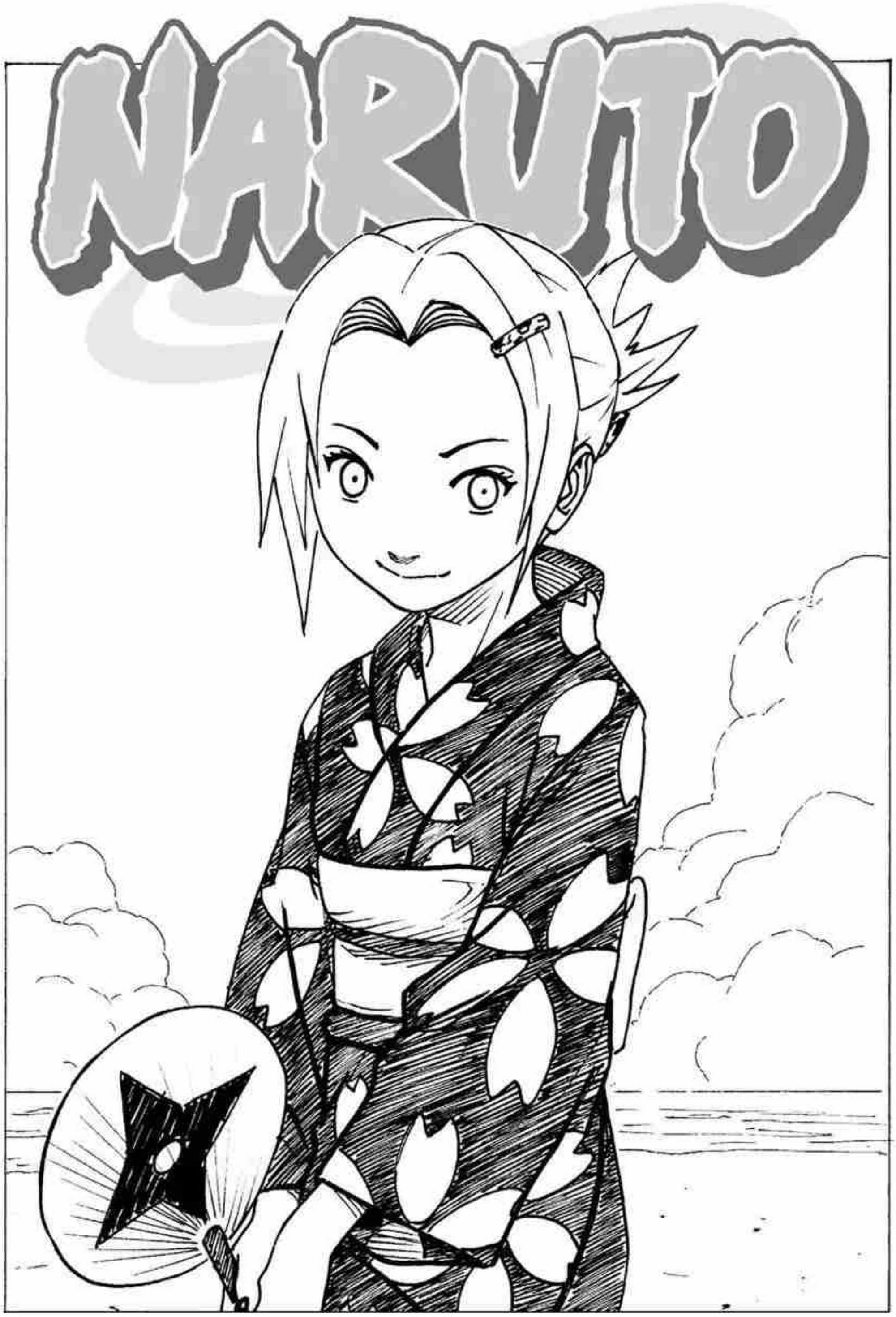
SHONEN JUMP MANGA EDITION



VOL. 8

LIFE-AND-DEATH BATTLES

STORY AND ART BY

MASASHI KISHIMOTO

SAKURA サクラ

Smart and studious, Sakura is the brightest of Naruto's classmates, but she's constantly distracted by her crush on Sasuke. Her goal: to win Sasuke's heart!

NARUTO ナルト

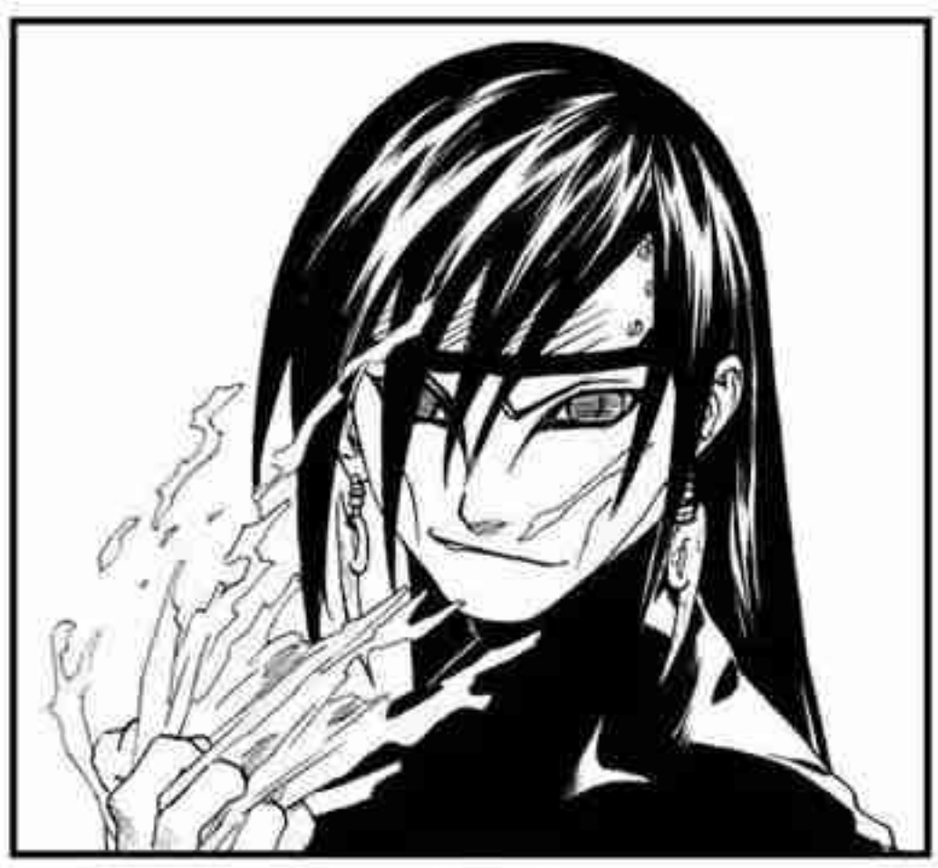
When Naruto was born, a destructive fox spirit was imprisoned inside his body. Spurned by the older villagers, he's grown into an attention-seeking trouble-maker. His goal: to become the village's next *Hokage*.

SASUKE サスケ

The top student in Naruto's class, Sasuke comes from the prestigious Uchiha clan. His goal: to get revenge on a mysterious person who wronged him in the past.

Iruka イルカ

Naruto, Sasuke and Sakura's teacher from their Ninja Academy days. Iruka has a soft spot in his heart for Naruto because he also grew up as an orphan.



Orochimaru 大蛇丸

This nefarious master of disguise attacked Sasuke and left a powerful curse-mark on his neck. He hopes to mold Sasuke into his successor…assuming he survives the effects of the curse!

The Third Hokage 三代目火影

The head ninja and leader of the village of Konohagakure.

Yakushi Kabuto
薬師 カブト

Kabuto helped Naruto's team finish the second stage of the exam, but they have no idea that he's one of Orochimaru's Sound Ninja spies!

THE STORY SO FAR...

Twelve years ago, a destructive nine-tailed fox spirit attacked the ninja village of Konohagakure. The *Hokage*, or village champion, defeated the fox by sealing its soul into the body of a baby boy. Now that boy, Uzumaki Naruto, has grown up to become a ninja-in-training, learning the art of *ninjutsu* with his classmates Sakura and Sasuke.

After a long and harrowing journey through the Forest of Death, Naruto, Sasuke and Sakura finally secure the scrolls they need to pass the second stage of the Chûnin (Journeyman Ninja) Selection Exam. With Heaven and Earth scrolls in hand, they head to the tower in the center of the Forest of Death that marks the exam's finish line. Inside the tower, Naruto, Sasuke and Sakura are greeted by a cryptic message from The Third Hokage. They understand enough of the message to realize they should open both of their scrolls at the same time, so they prepare to unfurl them, unsure of what they'll find inside…

NARUTO

VOL. 8

LIFE-AND-DEATH BATTLES

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Lp!
...
ANNG
Number 64: Lord Hokage's Message...!!

!

!

!

Number 64: Lord Hokage's Message...!!

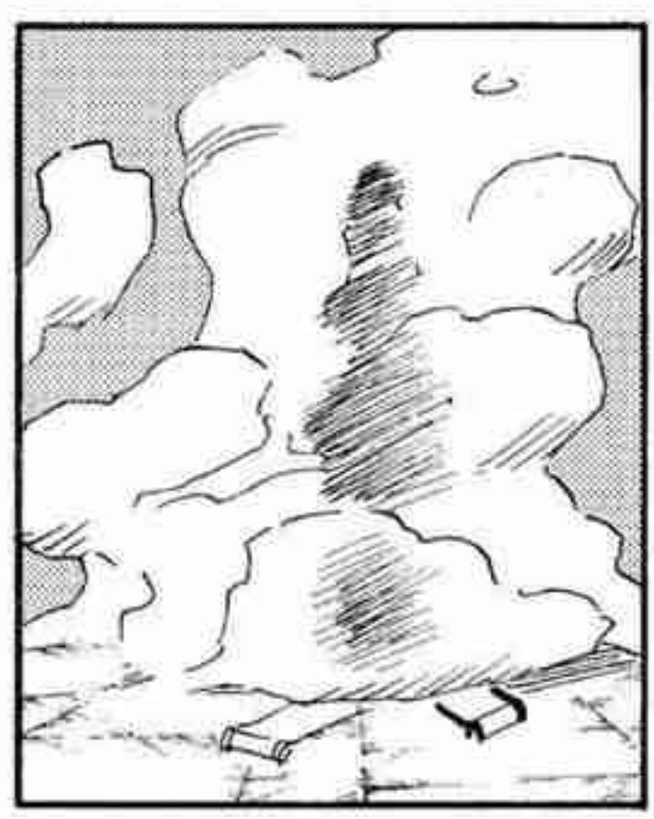
"THE CHARACTER IN THE CENTER OF THE SCROLLS MEANS "PERSON" OR "HUMANITY."

!!
FWUUM
NARUTO! SAKURA! DROP THE SCROLLS!! NOW!

...A SPELL OF SUMMONING!!
THIS IS...

POOF

FW
UP



?!

Y-YOU'RE...?!
!

...?!
HUNH?

HEY, KIDS...!

IT'S BEEN A WHILE, EH?

YOU THREE LOOK LIKE YOU'VE REALLY BEEN THROUGH THE WRINGER.
I DON'T UNDERSTAND!!
...
?
?
WHAT? HUH?
IT WAS JUST GOOD LUCK THAT I GOT TO BE THE MESSENGER FOR THE THREE OF YOU.
TAK
TAK
THE SPELL WAS DESIGNED SO THAT WE CHÛNIN COULD GREET THE APPLICANTS AT THE END OF THE SECOND EXAM.
MASTER IRUKA... WHAT ARE YOU DOING, POPPING UP OUT OF A SUMMONING SPELL?!
HUNH?! HUNH?!!
HEH!
POK
MESSENGER...?!
YOU BARELY MADE IT!
POP
YEAH...
TAK
TAK

YOU'VE ALL PASSED THE SECOND EXAM.

CONGRATULATIONS...

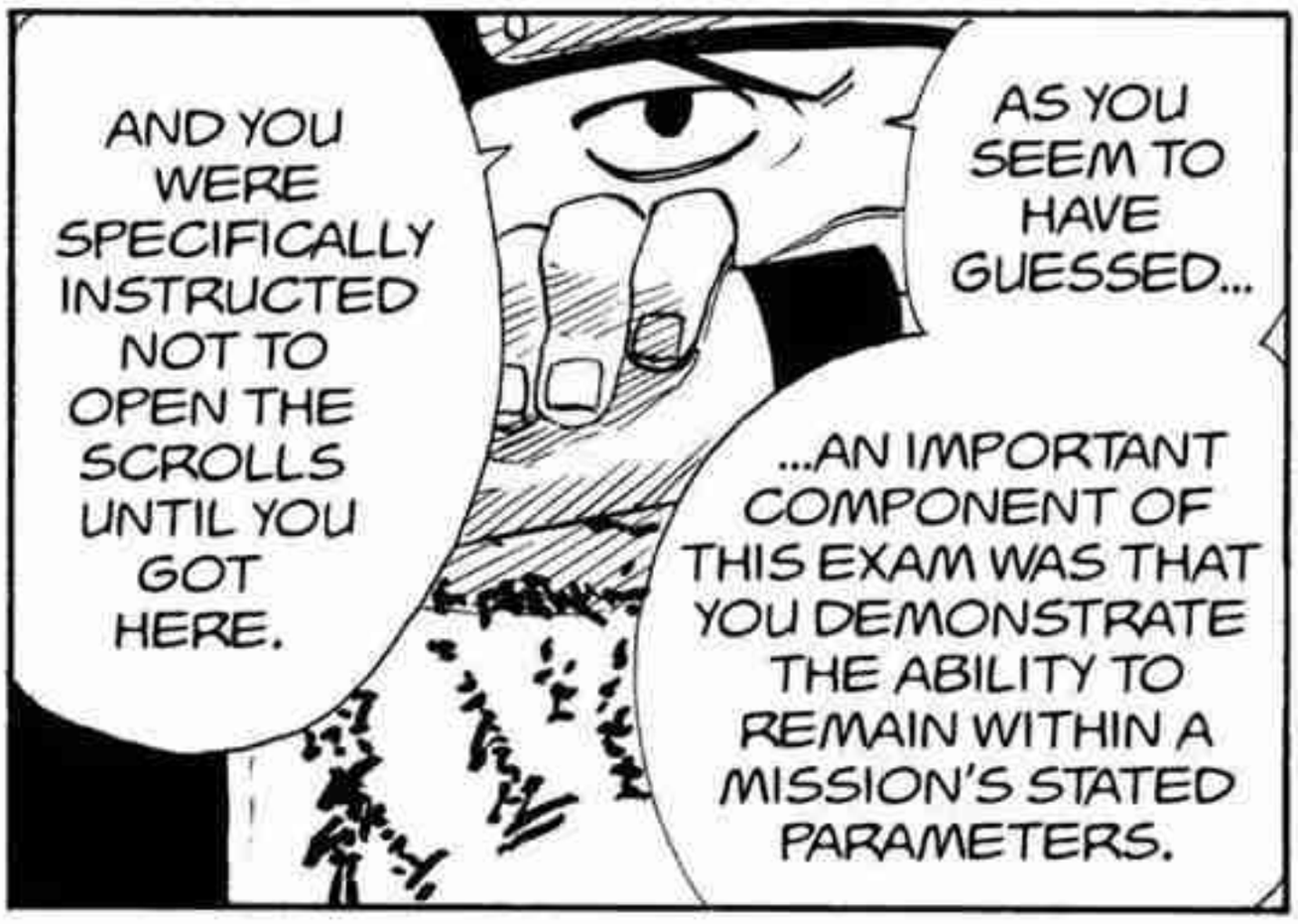
YES!!
YES! YES! YES!
LET ME FINISH...
H-HEY! NARUTO!
I'M SO HAPPY!!
YAYYY!!!
SHUT UP!
20
HE KEEPS GOING... AND GOING...
THUD
-SIGH-
FLOP

YOU HAVEN'T SLOWED DOWN A BIT...

...EH, NARUTO?

READ THIS WAY
SO IF WE HAD TRIED TO READ THEM TOO SOON...?!
...

SASUKE, YOU'RE AS SHARP AS EVER.
OOF!


AND YOU WERE SPECIFICALLY INSTRUCTED NOT TO OPEN THE SCROLLS UNTIL YOU GOT HERE.
AS YOU SEEM TO HAVE GUESSED...
...AN IMPORTANT COMPONENT OF THIS EXAM WAS THAT YOU DEMONSTRATE THE ABILITY TO REMAIN WITHIN A MISSION'S STATED PARAMETERS.

...WAS TO BE KNOCKED OUT UNTIL AFTER THE SECOND EXAM WAS OVER.
...OUR ORDERS WERE VERY SPECIFIC. ANYONE STANDING AROUND AN OPEN SCROLL...

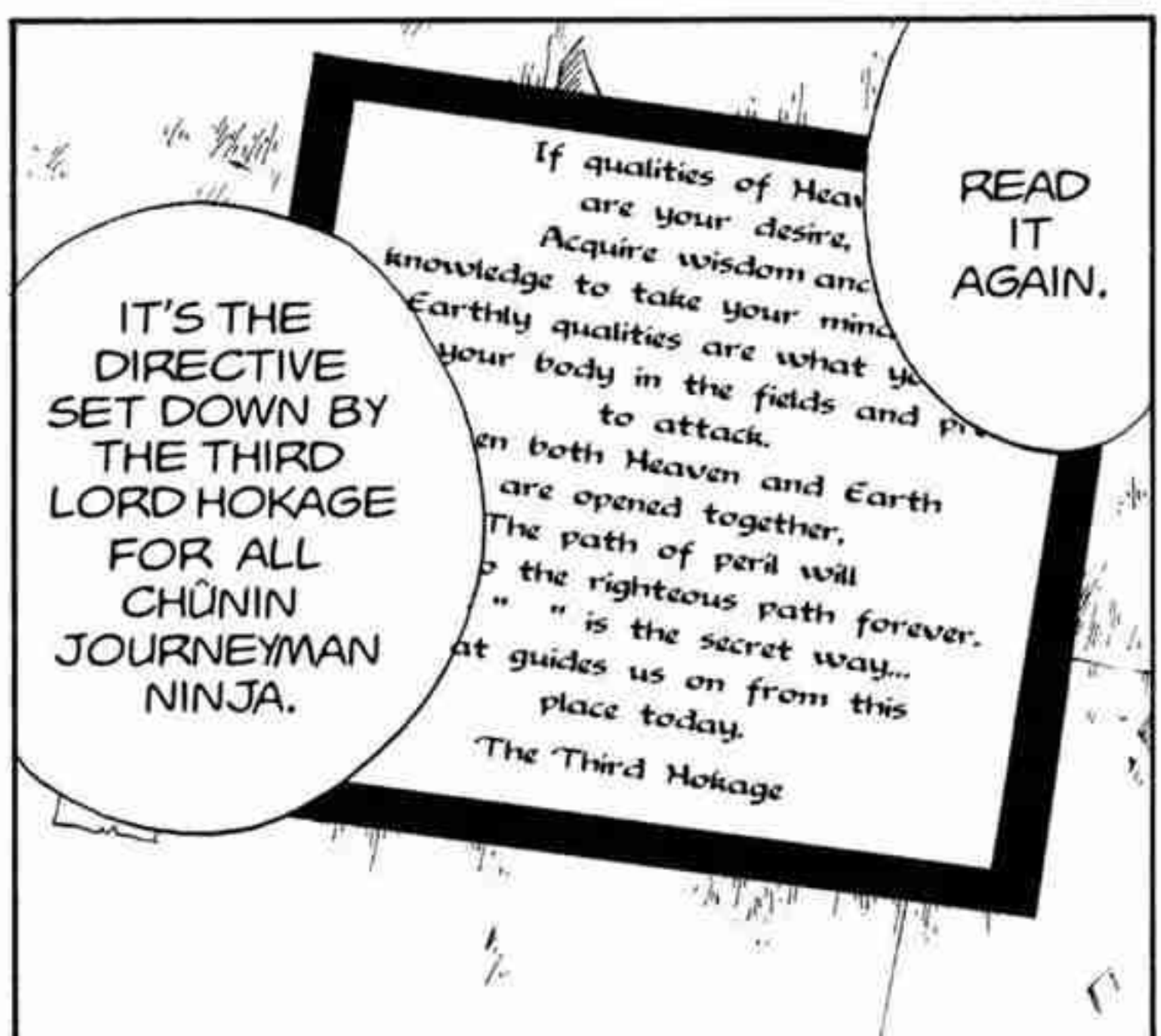
PHEW... WE WERE SO CLOSE TO DISASTER!
INNER SAKURA
I OWE YOU ONE!!!
K-KABUTO!!!

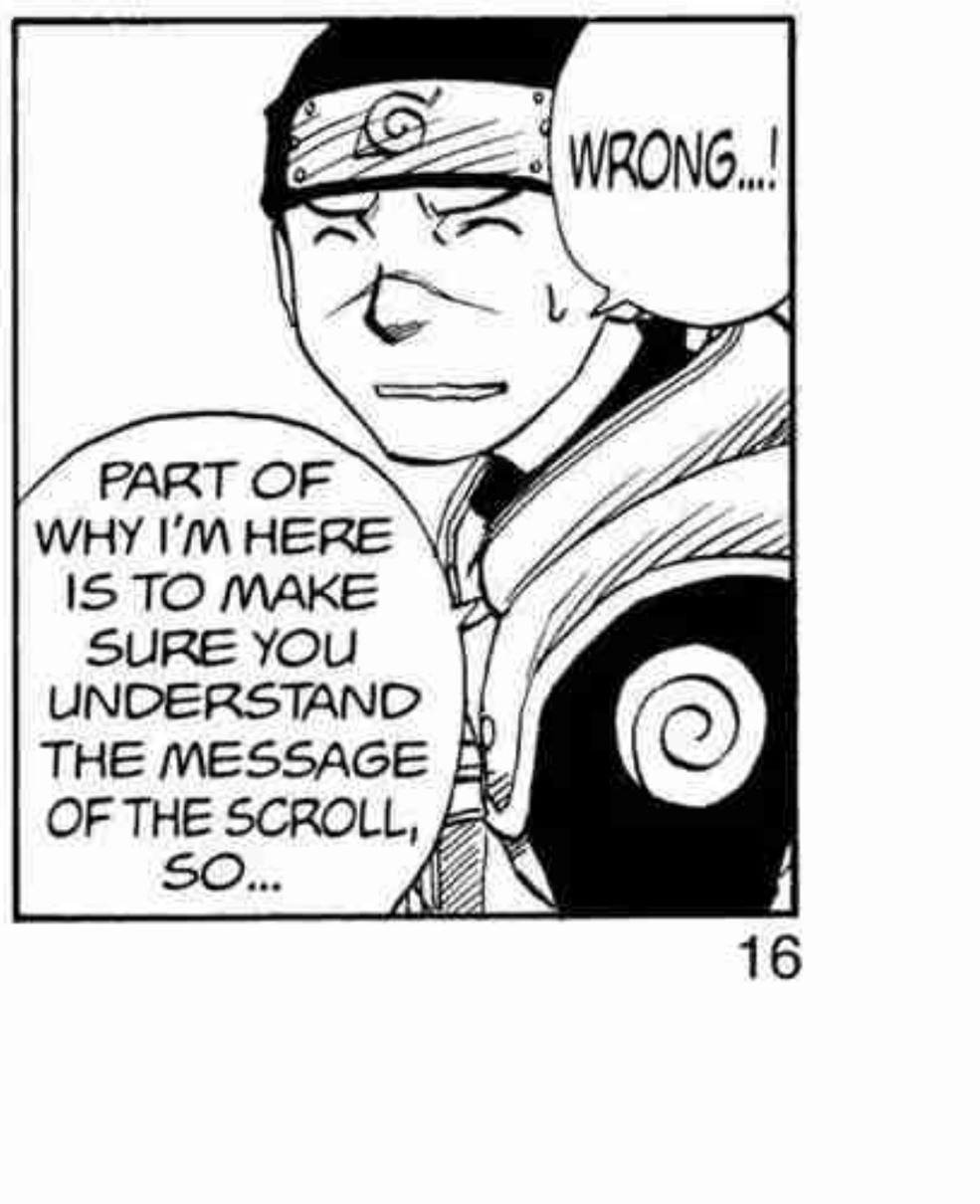
!!
HEH...
NOW AREN'T YOU TWO GLAD YOU DIDN'T OPEN IT?

...IT LOOKS LIKE MOTHS HAVE BEEN AT IT!
AND WE COULDN'T FIGURE OUT WHAT IT MEANS!

!
OH, RIGHT! MASTER IRUKA!!
WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THE WALL SCROLL?

IT DOESN'T MATTER ANYMORE... WE PASSED!!
GRR
SO? WHO CARES ...?!


IT'S THE DIRECTIVE SET DOWN BY THE THIRD LORD HOKAGE FOR ALL CHÛNIN JOURNEYMAN NINJA.
READ IT AGAIN.


WRONG...!
PART OF WHY I'M HERE IS TO MAKE SURE YOU UNDERSTAND THE MESSAGE OF THE SCROLL, SO...

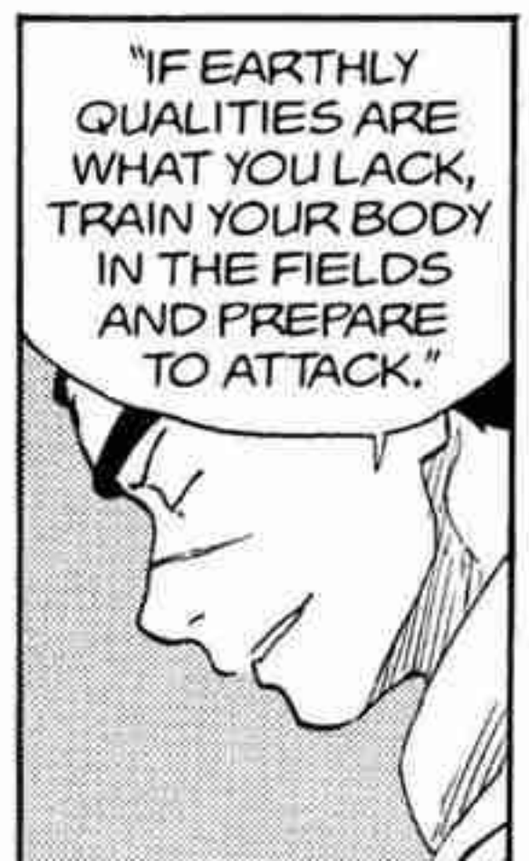
...AND "EARTH" REFERS TO THE HUMAN BODY.
THAT'S RIGHT! IN THE TEXT, THE WORD "HEAVEN" REFERS TO THE HUMAN MIND...
HMMM...

"DIRECTIVE"...?!

IF NARUTO'S WEAKEST AREA IS HIS BRAIN AND ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE...
JAB
"IF QUALITIES OF HEAVEN ARE YOUR DESIRE, ACQUIRE WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE TO TAKE YOUR MIND HIGHER."
IN OTHER WORDS...

...SHE NEEDS TO TRAIN HARD AND FIND THE RICHES OF PHYSICAL STAMINA AND SKILL.
IF SAKURA'S WEAK POINT IS WITH HER LACK OF STRENGTH AND POWER...
HEH HEH...

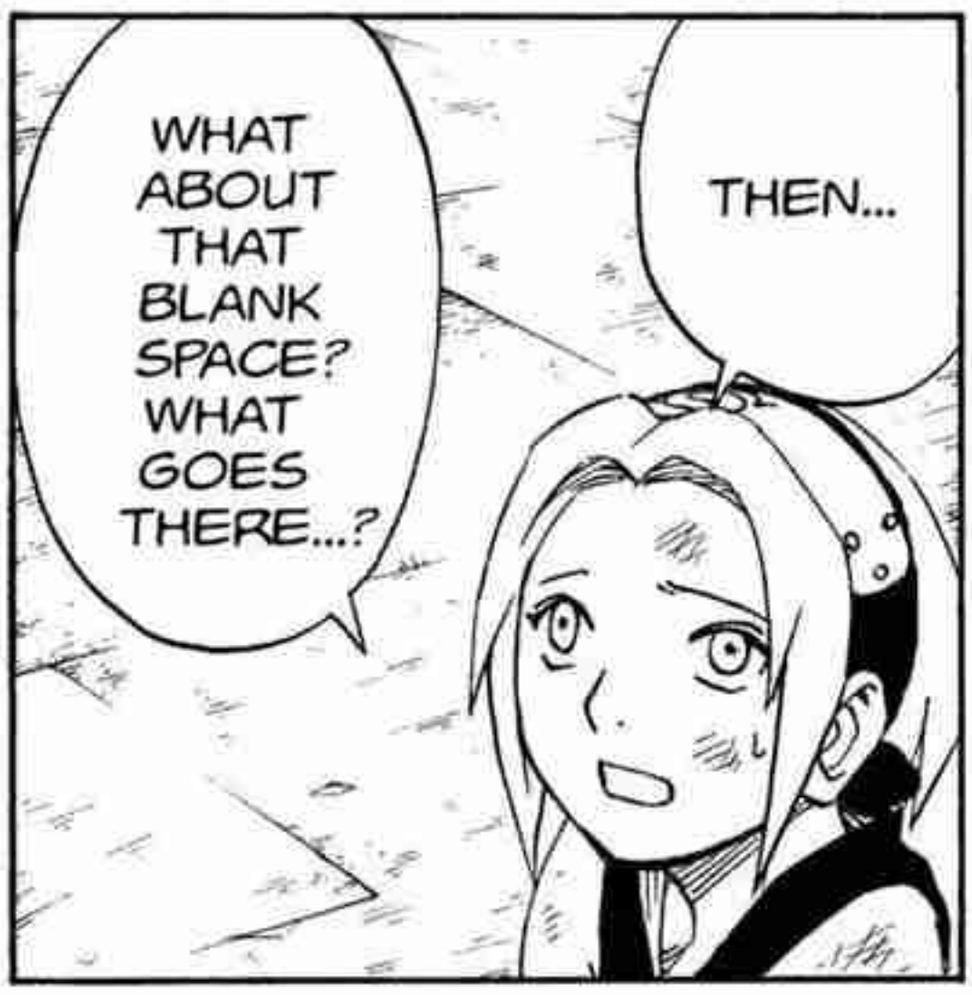
AND...


"IF EARTHLY QUALITIES ARE WHAT YOU LACK, TRAIN YOUR BODY IN THE FIELDS AND PREPARE TO ATTACK."

...HE'S GOT TO STUDY HARD AND LEARN THE PRINCIPLES THAT WILL HELP HIM ON HIS MISSIONS.
SCOWL
GET OUTTA MY FACE!
HEE HEE!

...NO MISSION, HOWEVER DANGEROUS, WILL BE A WRONG PATH FOR YOU.

AND ONCE YOU ACCESS THE QUALITIES OF BOTH HEAVEN AND EARTH...



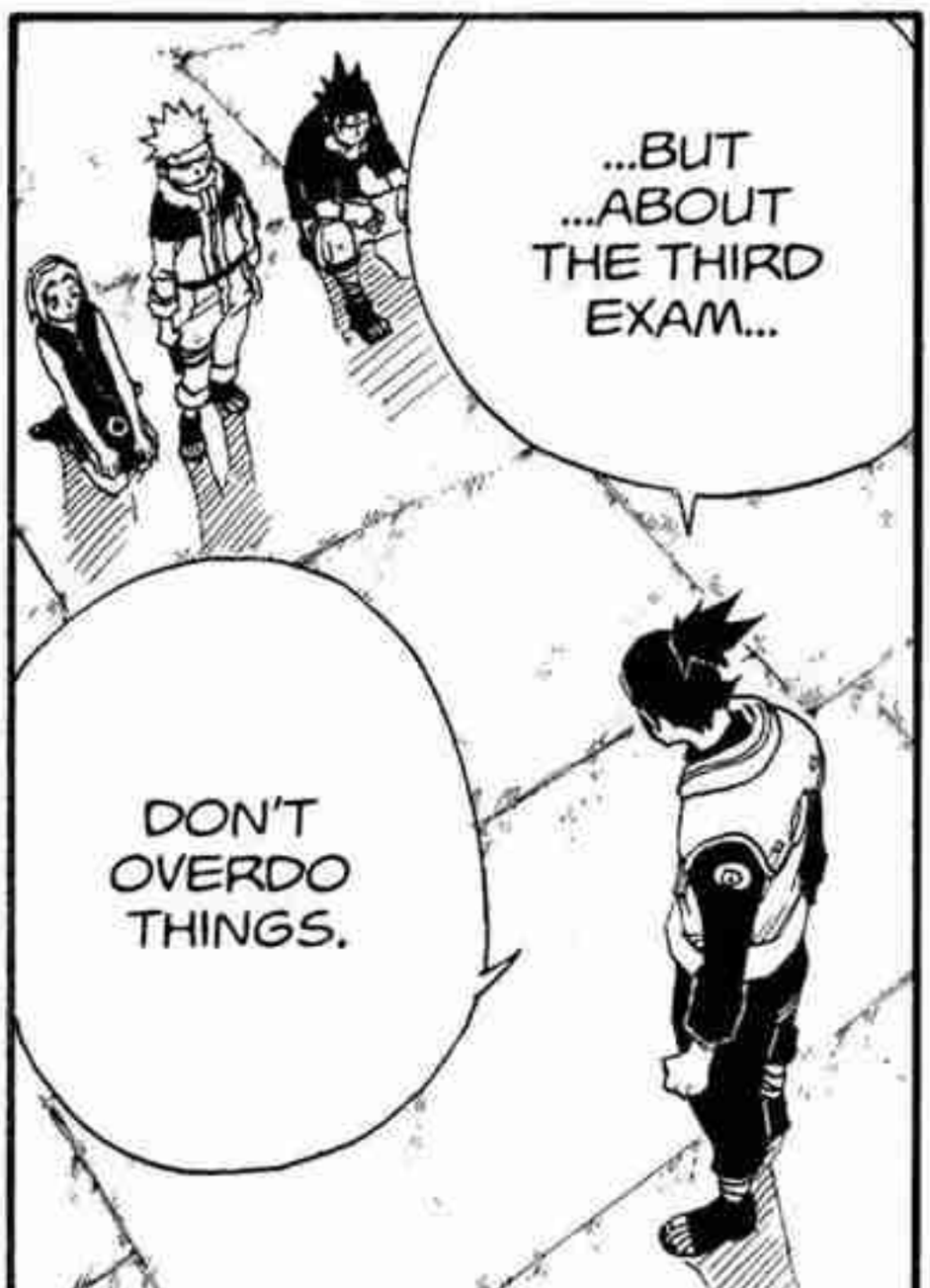
YOU ALL PASSED WITH FLYING COLORS.

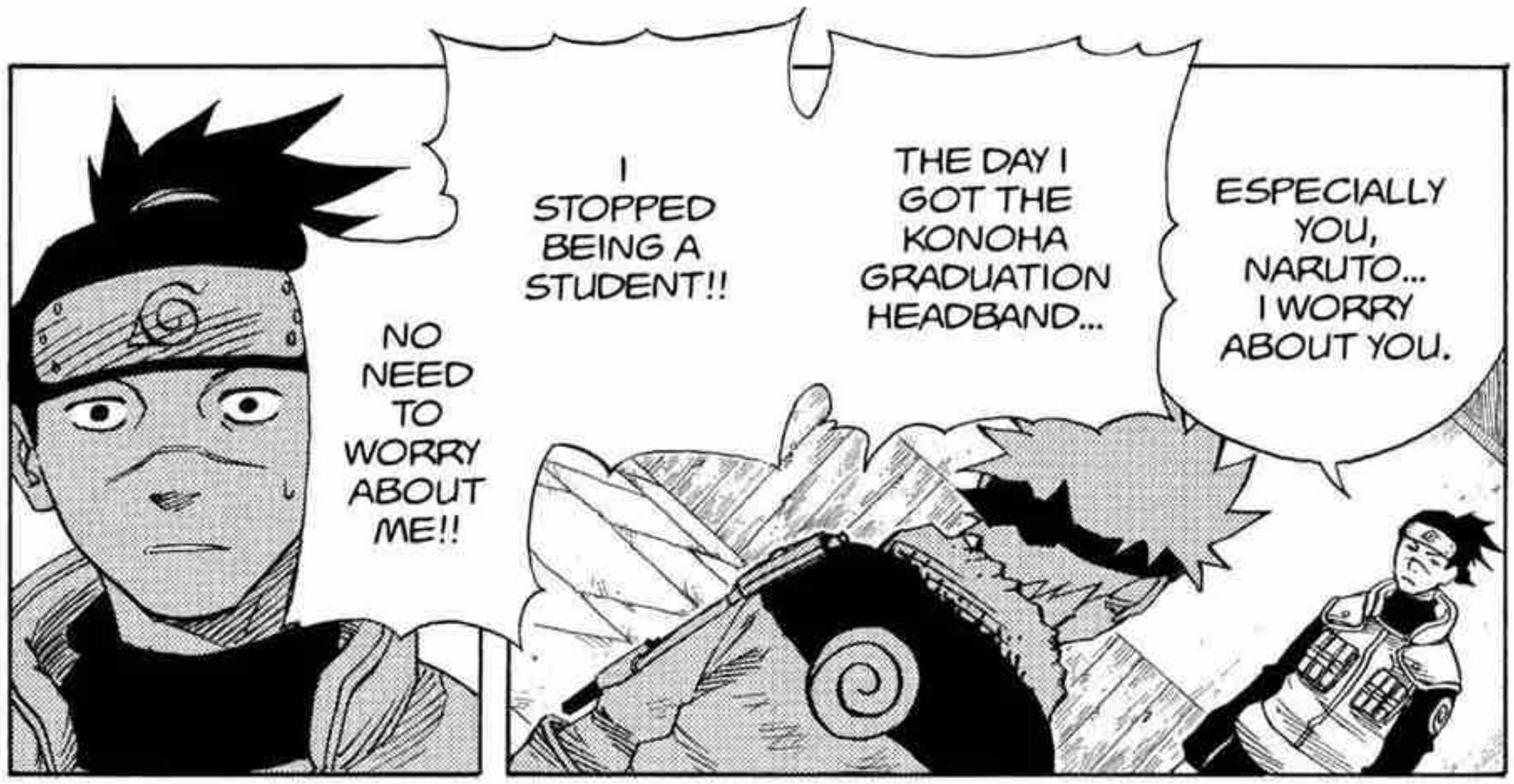
THE CHALLENGE OF SEEING WHO SURVIVED THESE PAST FIVE DAYS WAS A PART OF THE EXAM DESIGNED TO TEST THE APPLICANTS' BASIC CHÛNIN ABILITIES.

YES, SIR!!

THAT'S THE ENTIRE MESSAGE!!

THAT'S IT...

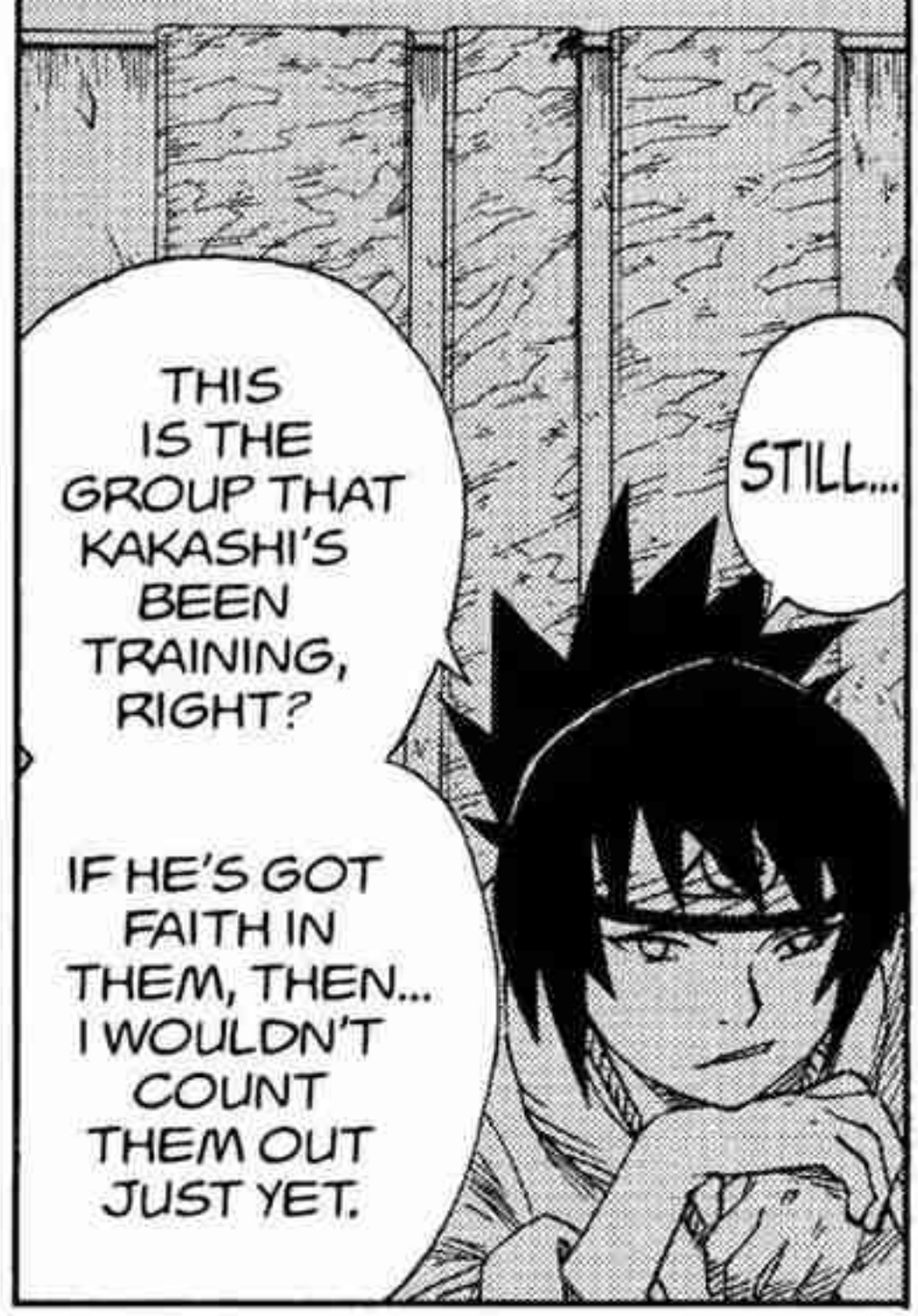



NO NEED TO WORRY ABOUT ME!!
I STOPPED BEING A STUDENT!!
THE DAY I GOT THE KONOHA GRADUATION HEADBAND...
ESPECIALLY YOU, NARUTO... I WORRY ABOUT YOU.

MY TEMPER HASN'T CHANGED ANY, AND MAYBE I'M IMPULSIVE AND FULL OF ENERGY...
...BUT I'M NOT A KID!!
IT'S PROOF OF MY MATURITY... AND I GOT IT FROM YOU, MASTER IRUKA!!

I'M...

...A FULL-FLEDGED SHINOBI! YOU GOT THAT?!


THIS IS THE GROUP THAT KAKASHI'S BEEN TRAINING, RIGHT?
IF HE'S GOT FAITH IN THEM, THEN... I WOULDN'T COUNT THEM OUT JUST YET.
STILL...

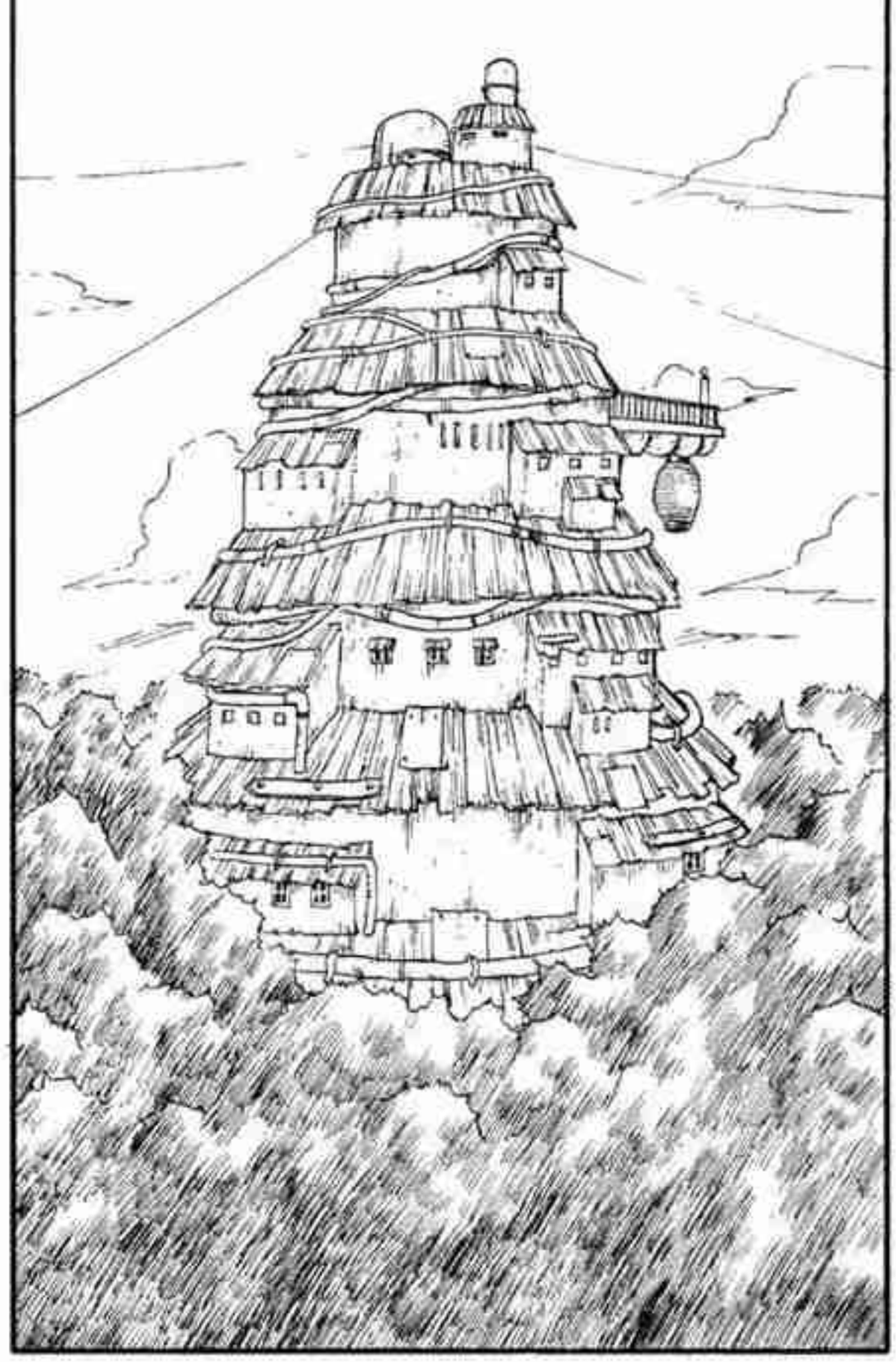
I REALLY APPRECIATE IT!
BOW

THEY ARE SOLDIERS UNDER MY COMMAND.
IT'S NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS, ANYWAY...
...THEY'RE NOT YOUR STUDENTS ANYMORE.

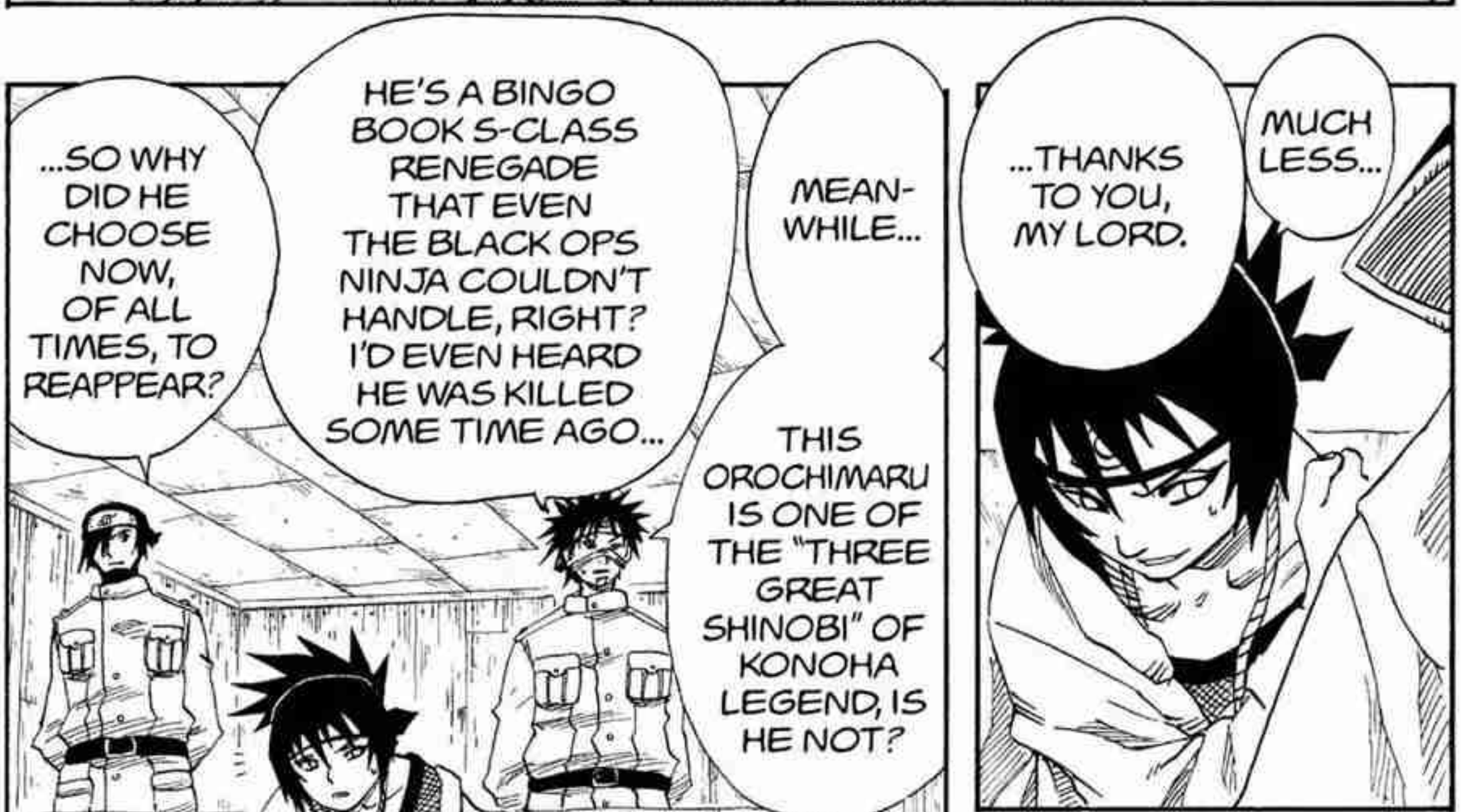
...WHO UNDER-STANDS JUST WHAT THESE KIDS CAN HANDLE.
WELL, KAKASHI... IT LOOKS LIKE IT'S YOU AND NOT ME...

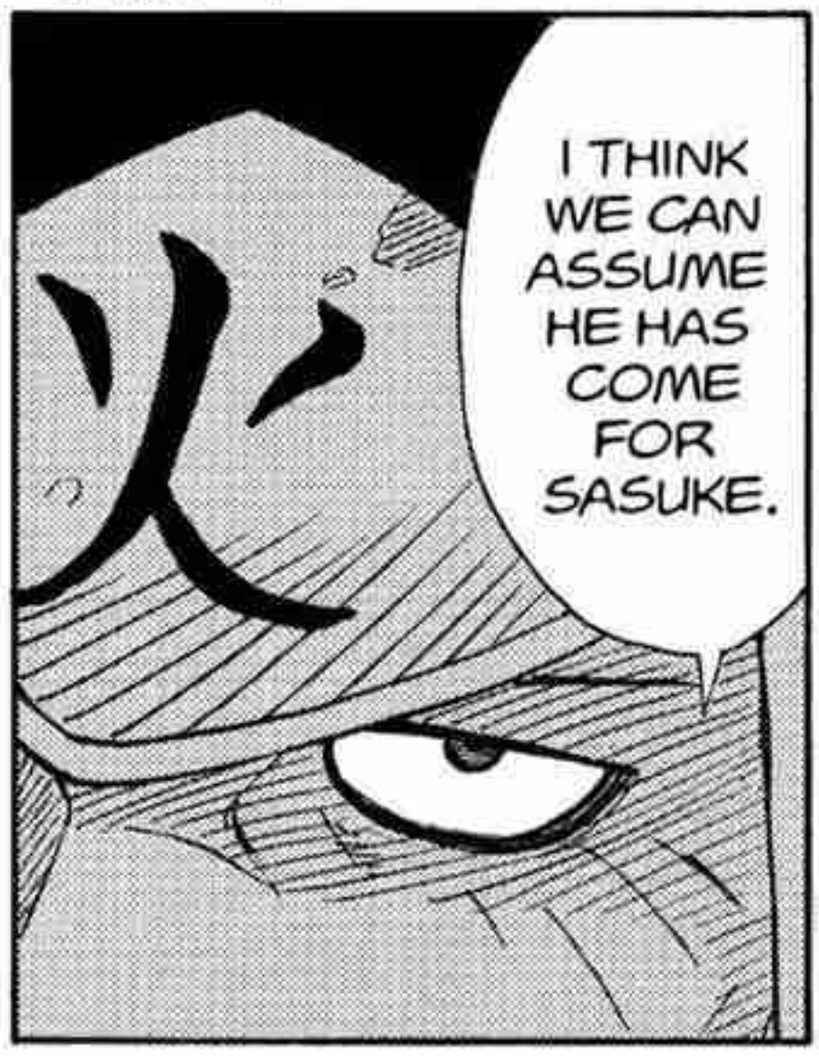
HEH HEH...

OOH...



DOES THE MARK OF THE CURSE STILL HURT?


...SO WHY DID HE CHOOSE NOW, OF ALL TIMES, TO REAPPEAR?
HE'S A BINGO BOOK S-CLASS RENEGADE THAT EVEN THE BLACK OPS NINJA COULDN'T HANDLE, RIGHT? I'D EVEN HEARD HE WAS KILLED SOME TIME AGO...
MEAN-WHILE...
THIS OROCHIMARU IS ONE OF THE "THREE GREAT SHINOBI" OF KONOHA LEGEND, IS HE NOT?
...THANKS TO YOU, MY LORD.
MUCH LESS...

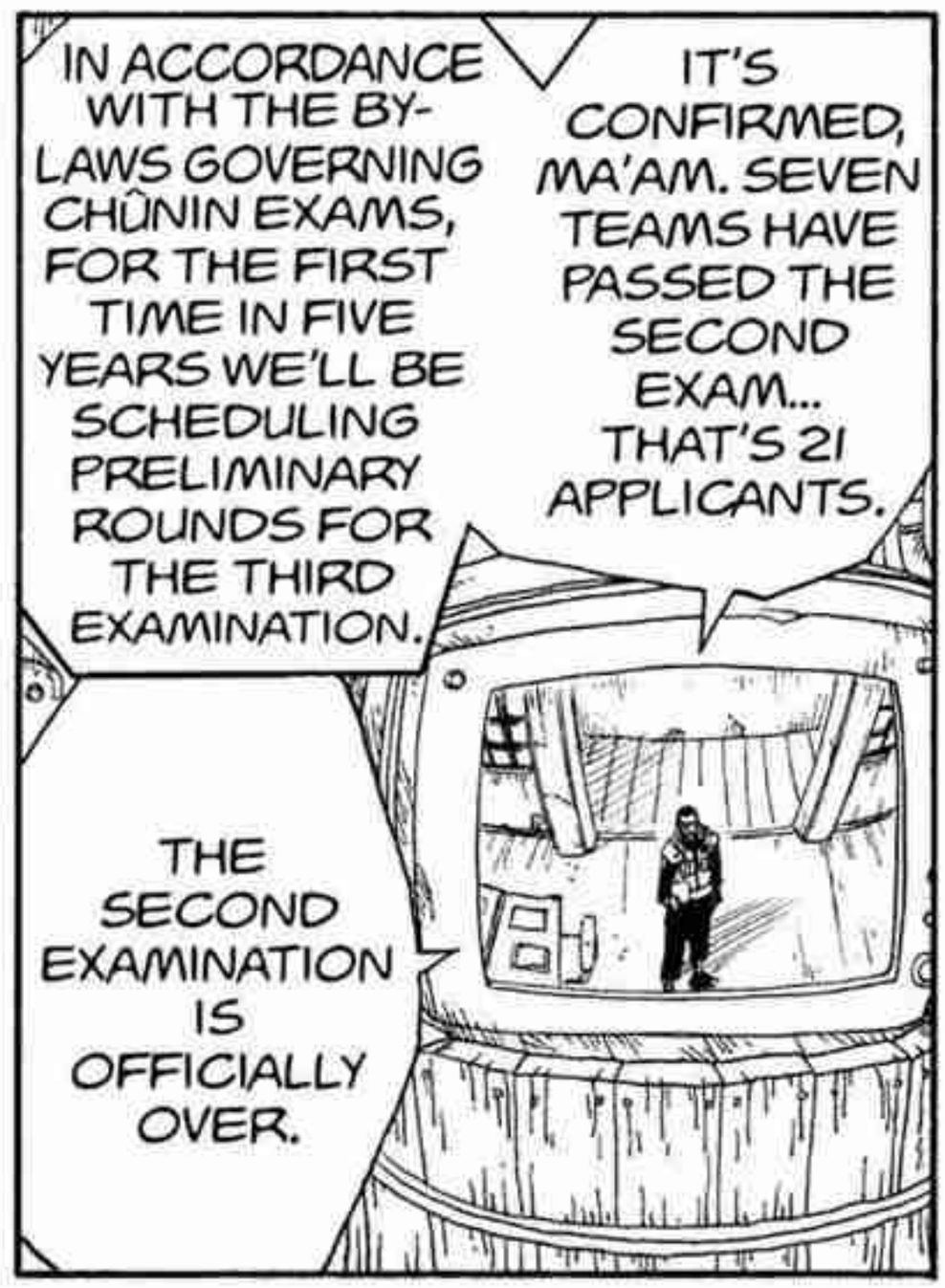

I THINK WE CAN ASSUME HE HAS COME FOR SASUKE.

PROB-ABLY HE--

THERE'S A CHILD I WANT, YOU SEE...
FOR HIS BLOODLINE IS THAT OF THE UCHIHA CLAN...

BEEEP
LADY ANKO!!
HUNH?!

...IN ANY CASE, WE'LL PROCEED WITH THE EXAMINATIONS AS PLANNED...
...WHILE KEEPING A CLOSE EYE ON OROCHIMARU'S MOVEMENTS, OF COURSE.
YES, SIR!


IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE BY-LAWS GOVERNING CHÛNIN EXAMS, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN FIVE YEARS WE'LL BE SCHEDULING PRELIMINARY ROUNDS FOR THE THIRD EXAMINATION.
IT'S CONFIRMED, MA'AM. SEVEN TEAMS HAVE PASSED THE SECOND EXAM... THAT'S 21 APPLICANTS.
THE SECOND EXAMINATION IS OFFICIALLY OVER.

THE WORLD OF KISHIMOTO MASASHI
MY PERSONAL HISTORY, PART 5

WHEN I GOT TO THE FINAL YEARS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, I GOT HOOKED ON *SHONEN JUMP* MANGA, THANKS TO THE ANIMATED *DRAGON BALL* SERIES. BUT EVEN BEFORE *DRAGON BALL*, I LOVED THE ANIME VERSION OF A *JUMP* COMIC CALLED *KINNIKUMAN* (*ULTIMATE MUSCLE*) ON TV. MY BROTHER AND I BOTH BECAME IDIOTICALLY OBSESSED WITH IT, AND THE TWO OF US PLAYED AROUND A LOT, DESIGNING OUR OWN SUPERHEROES.

MY LITTLE BROTHER'S FAVORITE CREATION WAS HIS KABUTOMUSHI (RHINOCEROS BEETLE) SUPERHERO KNOWN AS "BEETLE MAN," AND SINCE I WAS A FANATIC FOR SPICES AND CONDIMENTS, MY SPECIALTIES WERE "WASABI MAN" AND "KARASHI MUSTARD MAN" (PROBABLY DUE TO THE INFLUENCE OF A HERO CHARACTER IN *KINNIKUMAN* NAMED "CURRY COOK")... AFTER DISCOVERING WHAT GREAT SUPERHEROES I COULD MAKE OUT OF FOODSTUFFS, I ONLY HAD TO OPEN THE REFRIGERATOR TO FIND ALL KINDS OF HOT NEW IDEAS FOR ORIGINAL CHARACTERS. AND I REALLY THOUGHT THE VARIOUS SPICE NAMES HAD A NICERING TO THEM. BIZARRE, I KNOW... BUT I TOOK IT VERY SERIOUSLY BACK THEN.

AROUND THE SAME TIME, I GOT MY FIRST LOOK AT THE ANIMATED *FIST OF THE NORTH STAR*, AND I GOT TOTALLY INTO IT. AT SCHOOL, WHEN MY GROUP GOT ASSIGNED TO CLEAN THE CLASSROOM, IT WAS SO DIFFICULT TO CARRY THE HEAVY STEEL TRASH CAN OUT TO THE INCINERATOR ON THE FAR SIDE OF THE SCHOOLYARD THAT I DEVELOPED A TACTIC TO EVADE THE TASK. I'D POKE MY FRIEND'S TEMPLES WITH MY THUMBS AND SAY, "I HAVE JUST PRESSED ONE OF YOUR SECRET MERIDIAN POINTS. YOU WILL NOW TAKE THE TRASH CAN TO THE INCINERATOR TO EMPTY IT." MY FRIENDS WOULD RETALIATE BY RETORTING, "I HAVE PRESSED THE SAME SECRET POINT" IN VERY SERIOUS TONES, AND WE'D SPEND QUITE A WHILE PRESSING EACH OTHER'S SECRET POINTS -- IN A COMPLETELY FRIENDLY WAY -- WHILE GETTING MASSIVE EXPOSURE TO THINGS LIKE DIOXINS THAT THE WORLD HAD NEVER HEARD OF BACK THEN.

THOSE *JUMP* ANIME INSPIRED A LOT OF GOOD TIMES!

CONGRAT-ULATIONS TO YOU ALL...

65: Life-and-Death Battles!!

...ON PASSING THE SECOND EXAM!!

HEH... WE STARTED WITH 78 APPLICANTS... IT'S AMAZING THAT 21 OF THEM ACTUALLY MADE IT.

I SAID I WOULD PARE THEIR NUMBERS DOWN TO LESS THAN HALF, BUT REALLY I WAS ONLY EXPECTING A SINGLE DIGIT FIGURE...

Number 65: Life-and-Death Battles!!

SASUKE'S TEAM MADE IT!

STILL SO MANY COMPETITORS... WHAT A PAIN!

I'M FAMISHED!

MUNCH CRUNCH

YOUR STUDENTS MADE AN IMPRESSIVE SHOWING! I WONDER HOW MUCH OF IT WAS DUMB LUCK...

...NOT THAT IT MATTERS. MY TEAM IS BOUND TO KNOCK THEM OUT IN THE NEXT ROUND.

YOU ALWAYS DID TRY TO GET UNDER MY SKIN WITH YOUR ALOOF ACT.

HEH... GOOD ONE... AS ANNOYING AS EVER, KAKASHI...

?

!

WHAT?!

I'M SORRY... DID YOU SAY SOME-THING?

HUH?

AH, WELL... SOME-TIMES BEING YOUNG IS ALL ABOUT LEARNING TO DEAL WITH HEART-BREAK, EH, KAKASHI?

AT THE NEXT LEVEL, IT WILL BE ALL ABOUT THEIR ABILITIES... OR LACK THEREOF.

HE'S THE MAN!

NONE OF THE OTHER TEACHERS ARE AS COOL AS MASTER GUY. NOT EVEN CLOSE!!

MAN, HE BEATS MASTER GUY HANDS DOWN IN THE LOOKS DEPARTMENT...

WOW, SO THAT'S MASTER GUY'S ARCHRIVAL...

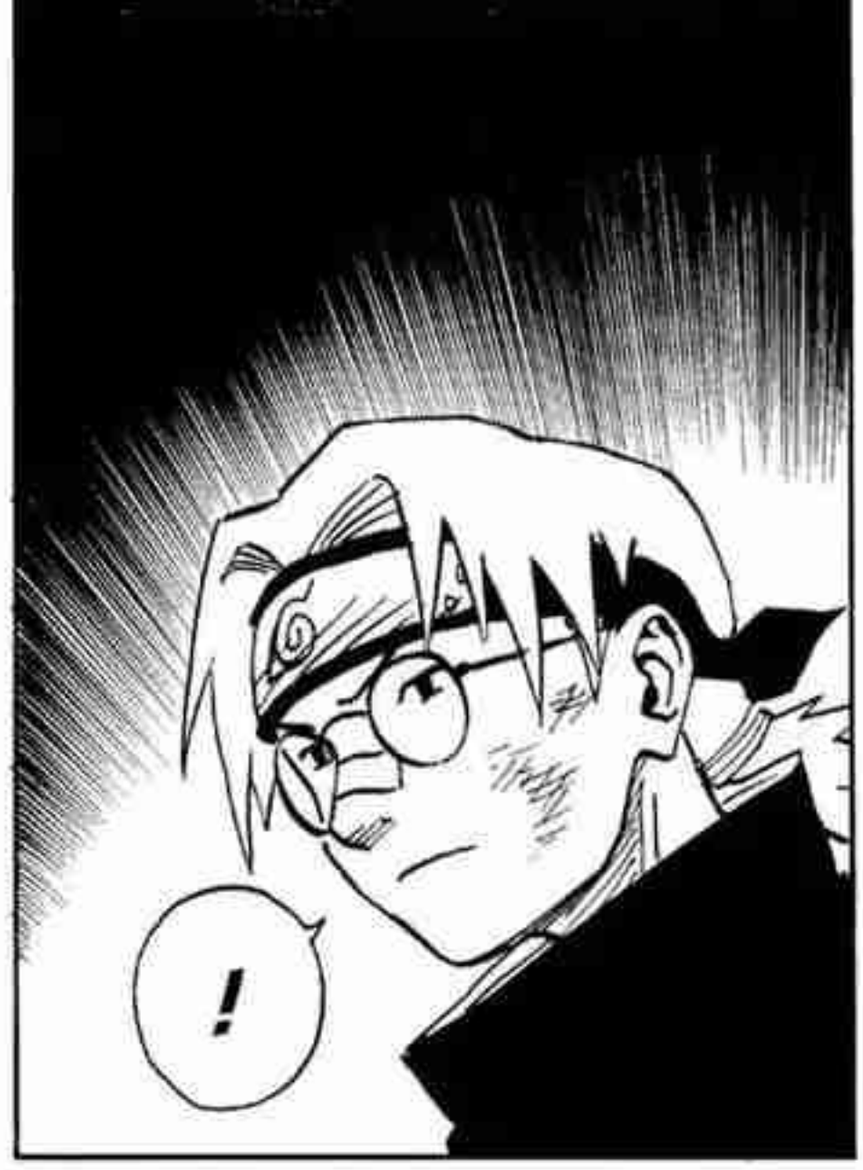
SO NOW ONLY THE REAL PLAYERS ARE LEFT.

AND UCHIHA SASUKE MADE IT, EH...?

JUST WAIT, MASTER GUY! I'LL MAKE YOU PROUD!!

YOU'LL PAY FOR INJURING MY ARMS, UCHIHA SASUKE...

...

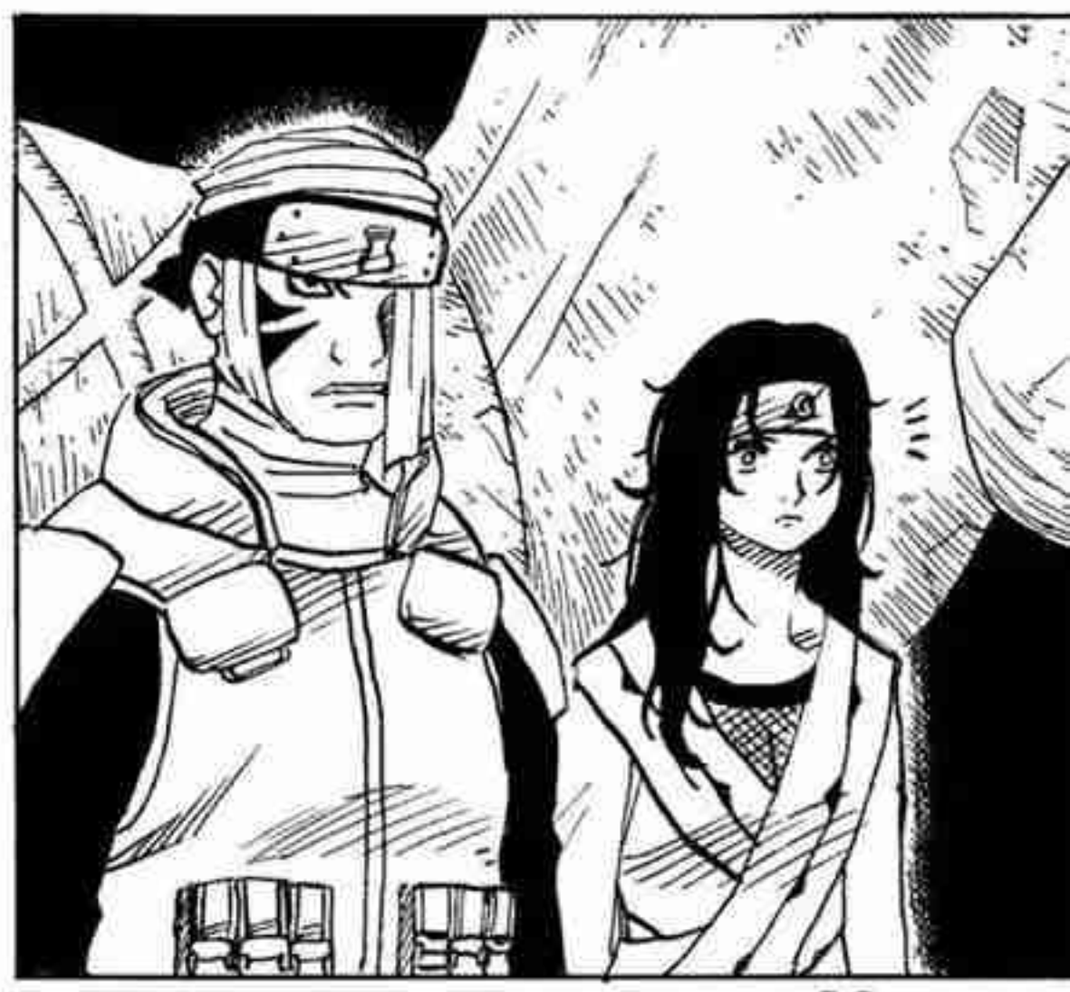

!

GRRR

AMAZING... THERE WERE 26 THREE-MAN TEAMS AT THE START, AND ONLY SEVEN TEAMS FINISHED.

AKAMARU'S ACTING STRANGE...

SO YOU CAME THROUGH WITHOUT A SCRATCH AFTER ALL, GAARA...



THOSE GUYS FROM THE SAND VILLAGE...

NARUTO PASSED, TOO... I'M SO GLAD! YAY!

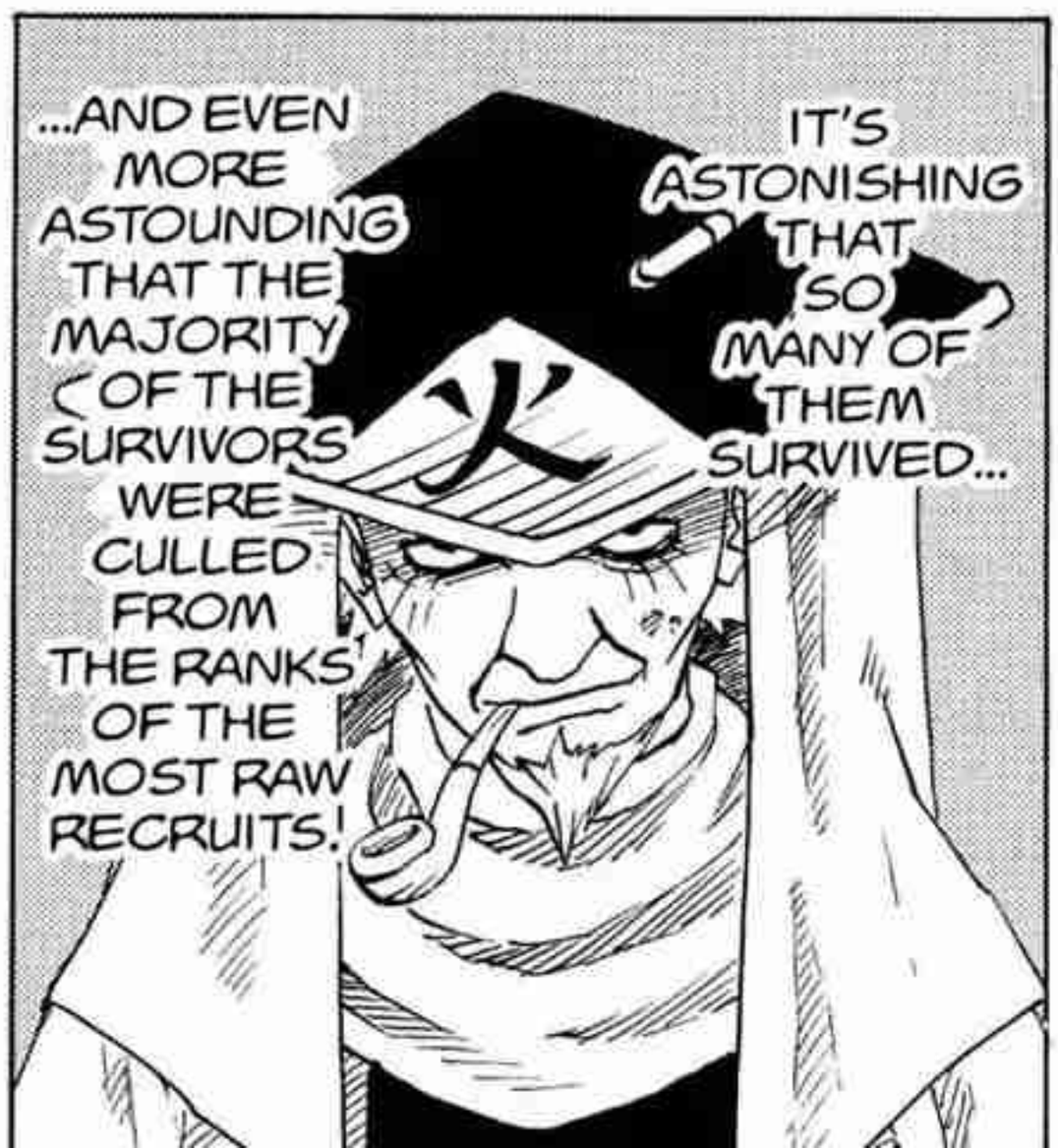
-)WHINE(-

OLD MAN HOKAGE, MASTER IRUKA, MASTER KAKASHI, AND EVEN THAT MEGA-BROWS GUY ARE ALL GATHERED TOGETHER!

HEY! CHECK IT OUT!

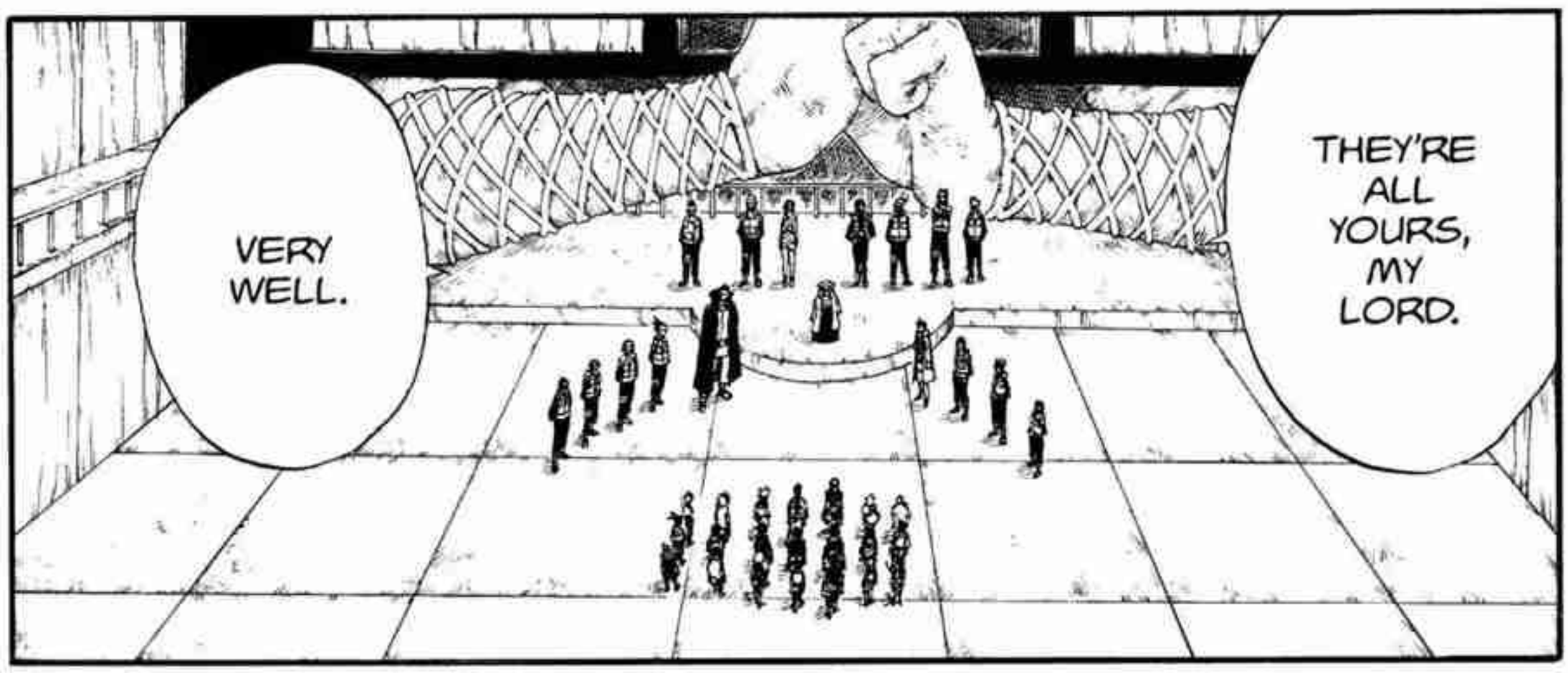
WHAT THE...?! ALL OF THE APPLICANTS FROM KONOHA ARE HERE!

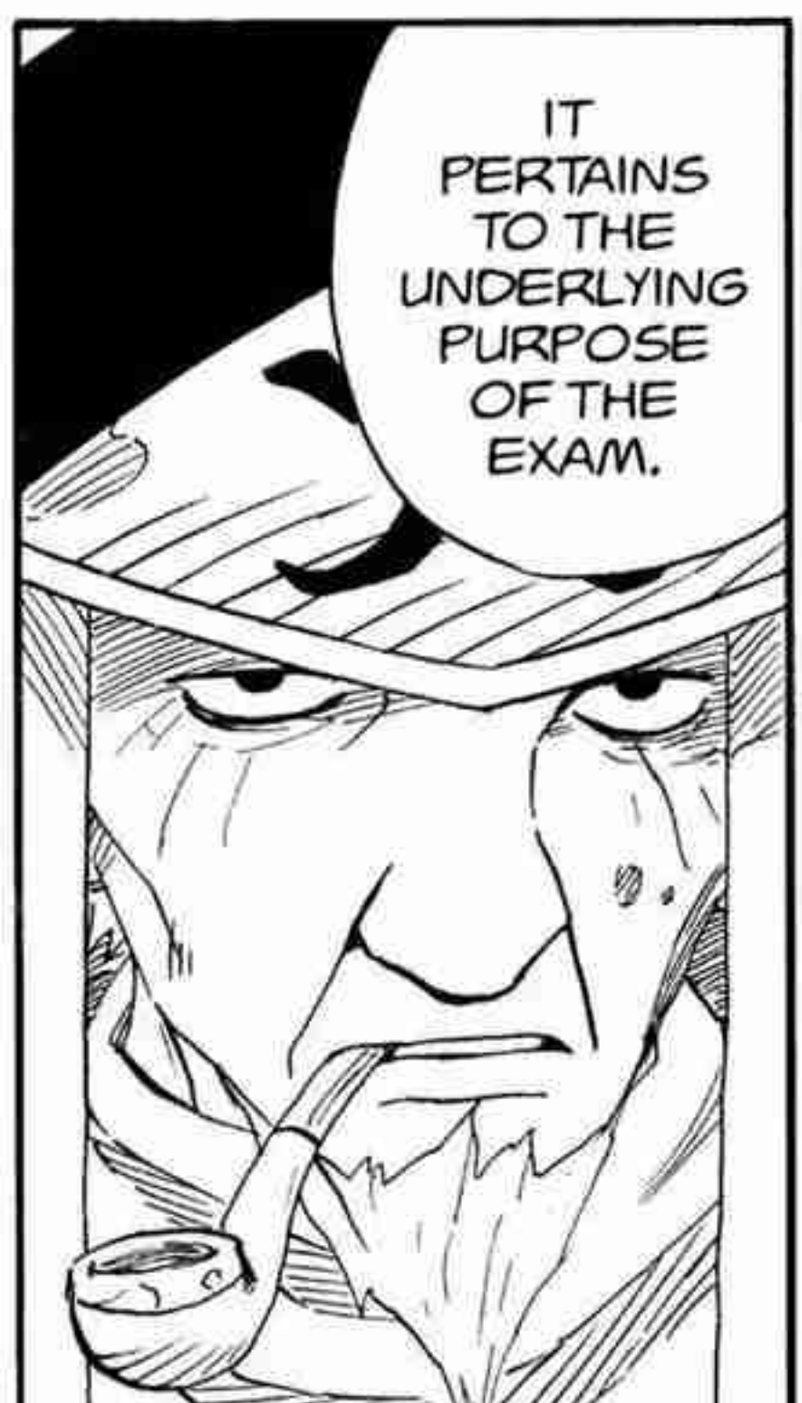
IT'S LIKE A DREAM TEAM!



LISTEN UP AND TAKE EVERY WORD HE SAYS TO HEART!!
NOW LORD HOKAGE HIMSELF WILL EXPLAIN ABOUT THE THIRD EXAM.

NO WONDER THEIR INSTRUCTORS VIED FOR THE RIGHT TO RECOMMEND THEM FOR THIS COMPETITION...


VERY WELL.
THEY'RE ALL YOURS, MY LORD.


IT PERTAINS TO THE UNDERLYING PURPOSE OF THE EXAM.

...LET ME MAKE ONE THING PERFECTLY CLEAR!!!
THE THIRD EXAMINATION IS ABOUT TO COMMENCE... BUT BEFORE I GO INTO THE SPECIFICS OF HOW IT WILL BE CONDUCTED...

?!
?

?!

WHY DO YOU SUPPOSE AN EXAMINATION OF THIS NATURE IS BEING JOINTLY CONDUCTED BY ALL OF THE NATIONS IN OUR MUTUAL ALLIANCE?!

...TH... THE PUR-POSE... ?!
?!

THIS SERIES OF SO-CALLED EXAMINATIONS IS, IN FACT...
"TO PROMOTE FRIENDSHIP AMONG ALLIED NATIONS AND RAISE THE LEVEL AND STANDARDS IN THE ART OF THE SHINOBI..."
BE VERY CLEAR ABOUT WHAT THOSE FINE-SOUNDING PHRASES ACTUALLY MEAN!

...
愛

SIGH...
...

"...SO-CALLED..."?

...A WAR-IN-MINIATURE BETWEEN ALL OF OUR ALLIED LANDS.

...A TEMPORARY AND MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL AGREEMENT BETWEEN A GROUP OF GEOGRAPHICALLY CONTIGUOUS LANDS...

IF YOU WERE TO STUDY OUR RECENT HISTORY-- AND CONSULT A MAP-- IT WOULD SWIFTLY BECOME APPARENT THAT OUR ALLIANCE IS, IN FACT...

WH-WHAT DO YOU MEAN...?

?!

I THOUGHT THE POINT WAS TO SELECT CHÛNIN!

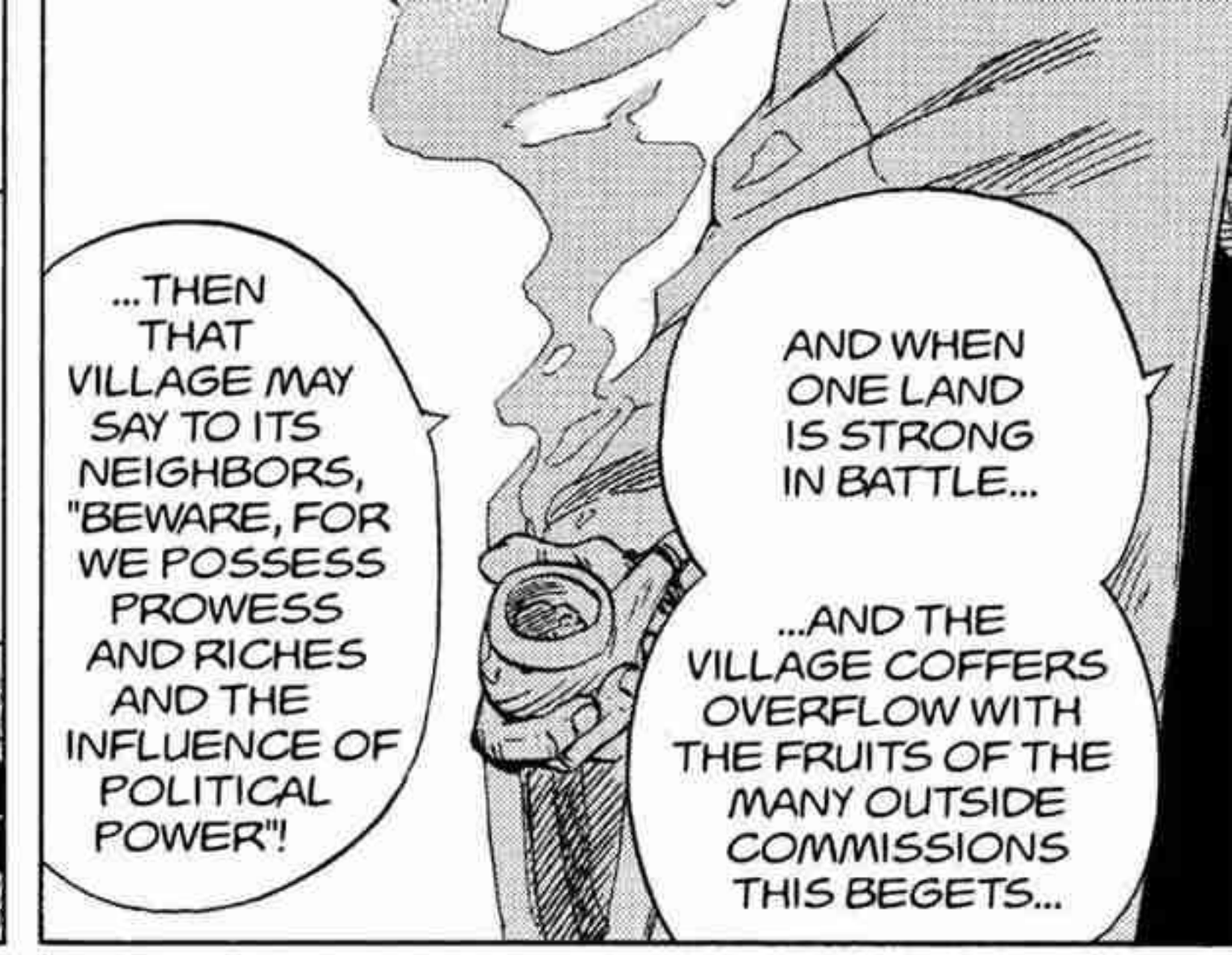
THAT'S THE STUPIDEST THING I EVER HEARD!

...UNTIL A BETTER WAY WAS DEVISED... THE WAY OF THE CHÛNIN JOURNEYMAN NINJA SELECTION EXAMINATION...!

...WHOSE PREVIOUS EXISTENCE WAS ONE OF CONTINUAL STRIFE... CONSTANTLY JOCKEYING AGAINST ONE ANOTHER, OPENLY AND IN SECRET, FOR POWER AND THE CONTROL OF RESOURCES THAT WERE PERPETUALLY DEPLETED ALMOST TO EXHAUSTION IN THE STRUGGLE...

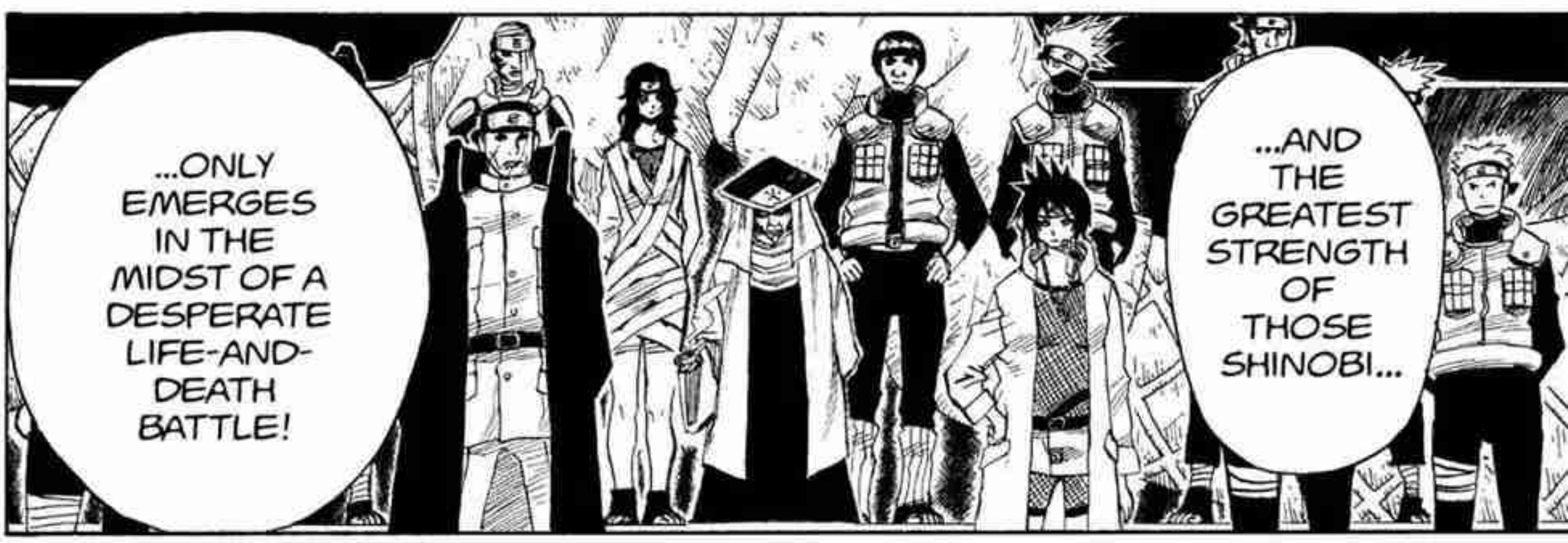
...YOUNG SHINOBI MAY FIGHT... TO THE DEATH, IF NEED BE!
...IT SERVES AS AN ARENA WHEREIN, FOR THE HONOR OF THEIR RESPECTIVE HOMELANDS...
MAKE NO MISTAKE. WHEN THIS EXAM IS DONE, IT WILL HAVE HAD THE SIDE EFFECT...
...OF WINNOWING OUT ANY APPLICANTS UNFIT TO ASCEND TO THE LEVEL OF CHÛNIN. BUT EVEN MORE IMPORTANTLY...
THEY WILL BE WATCHING YOU.
AND AMONG THEIR NUMBER WILL BE THOSE WHO RULE OVER EACH COUNTRY'S OWN HIDDEN NINJA VILLAGES.
THIS THIRD EXAMINATION WILL BE CONDUCTED UNDER THE WATCHFUL EYES OF A NUMBER OF DISTINGUISHED GUESTS...
THE HONOR OF THEIR LANDS...?!
...INCLUDING THE RULERS AND NOBILITY OF THE VARIOUS LANDS YOU ALL ASPIRE TO SERVE.
...
CONVERSELY, IF A PARTICULAR COUNTRY'S APPLICANTS ARE SHOWN TO BE INCOMPETENT OR FEEBLE...
...COMMISSIONS TO AGENTS OF THAT COUNTRY WILL DWINDLE.
IF ANY ONE NATION'S APPLICANTS DEMONSTRATE OUTSTANDING SKILL AND SUPERIORITY...
...THE NOBLEMEN FROM EVERY LAND WILL BE QUICK TO COMMISSION WORK FROM THOSE TRAINED IN THAT SUPERIOR NATION.

WHY IS IT NECESSARY TO STAKE OUR LIVES AND FIGHT...?!
SO?!


...THEN THAT VILLAGE MAY SAY TO ITS NEIGHBORS, "BEWARE, FOR WE POSSESS PROWESS AND RICHES AND THE INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL POWER"!
AND WHEN ONE LAND IS STRONG IN BATTLE...
...AND THE VILLAGE COFFERS OVERFLOW WITH THE FRUITS OF THE MANY OUTSIDE COMMISSIONS THIS BEGETS...

...AND THE VILLAGE DRAWS STRENGTH FROM THE SHINOBI WHO LIVE THERE...
THE STRENGTH OF A COUNTRY IS DERIVED FROM THE STRENGTH OF ITS VILLAGE...

...


...ONLY EMERGES IN THE MIDST OF A DESPERATE LIFE-AND-DEATH BATTLE!
...AND THE GREATEST STRENGTH OF THOSE SHINOBI...

AS YOU STRUGGLE FOR THE SAKE OF YOUR VERY LIVES AND YOUR PEOPLE, YOU HELP TO FULFILL THE DREAM THAT WAS ENVISIONED BY OUR ANCESTORS.

THIS TEST HAS MEANING AND GREAT CONSEQUENCE.

THESE EXAMS PROVIDE A PUBLIC ARENA FOR EACH COUNTRY TO SHOW OFF AND BOAST OF THE STRENGTH OF ITS WARRIORS...

...AND HENCE THE STRENGTH OF THE COUNTRY ITSELF!

TO PRESERVE THE BALANCE OF POWER AT THE RISK OF LIVES...

...IS THE ESSENCE OF FRIENDSHIP IN THE WORLD OF SHINOBI.

THOUGH MY MEANING IS SUBTLE, I CHOSE MY WORDS WITH CARE.

...YOU'VE ALWAYS EMPHASIZED THE CONCEPT OF "FRIENDSHIP" ... WHY?!

BUT...

YOU ARE TAKING NO ORDINARY TEST!

LET ME REITERATE BEFORE THE THIRD EXAM BEGINS...

...

...BUT THE DIGNITY AND PRESTIGE OF YOUR HOME VILLAGE AS WELL.

YOU RISK NOT ONLY YOUR OWN FUTURES AND YOUR DREAMS...

NOW I GET IT!

...

WELL... THE TRUTH IS...

?

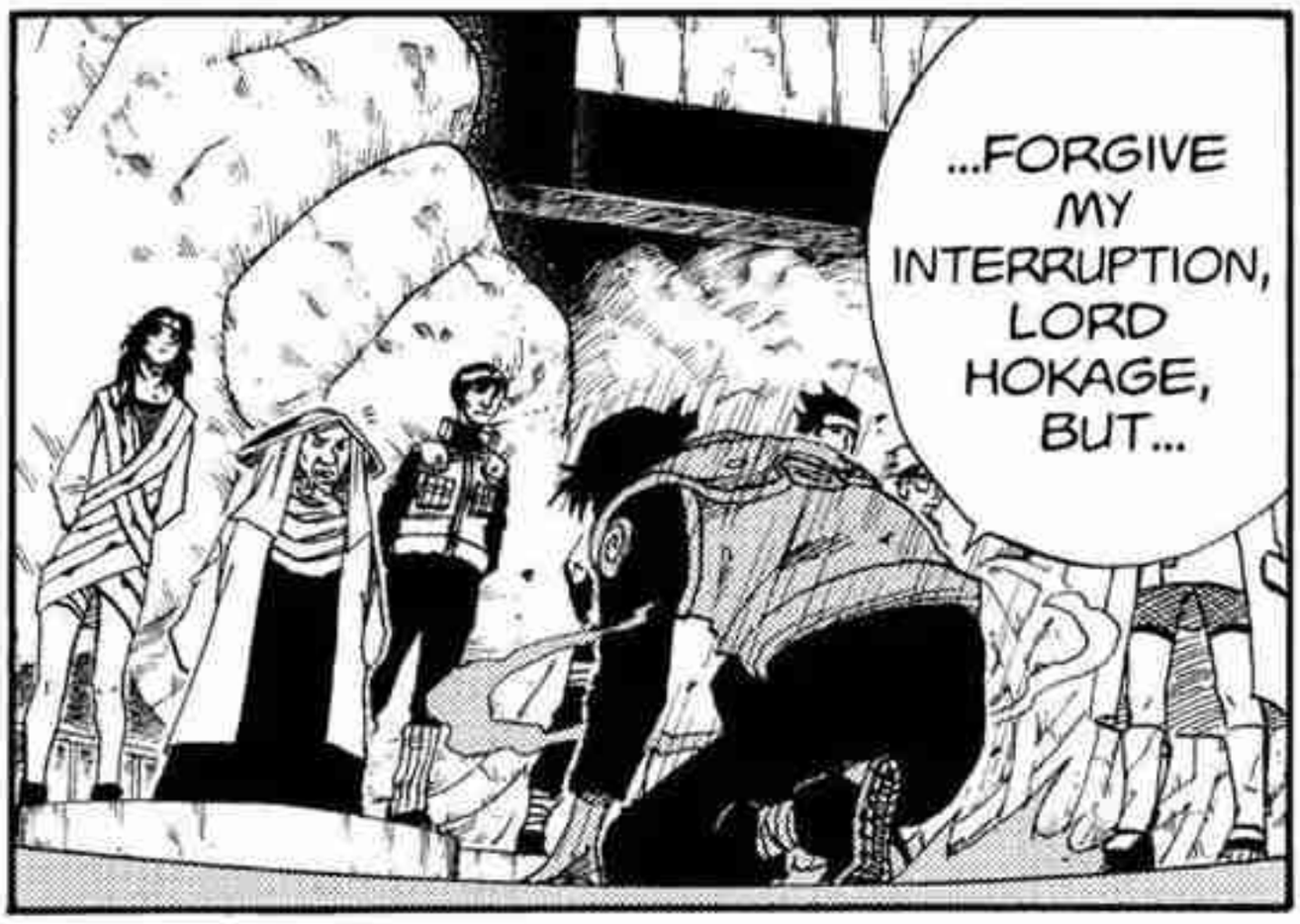
SO, YOU INSIST I EXPLAIN THE THIRD EXAM?

HMPH!

COULD YOU WRAP UP THE PHILOSOPHICAL TALK AND GET DOWN TO THE LIFE-AND-DEATH STUFF ANY TIME SOON?

WHATEVER...

READ
THIS
WAY


...FORGIVE MY INTERRUPTION, LORD HOKAGE, BUT...

IF YOU DON'T MIND HANDING THE REST OF THE PROCEEDINGS OVER...
...TO ME, GEKKO HAYATE, PROCTOR OF THE THIRD EXAM.

GOOD TO MEET YOU, EVERYONE... I'M HAYATE.

OKAY!

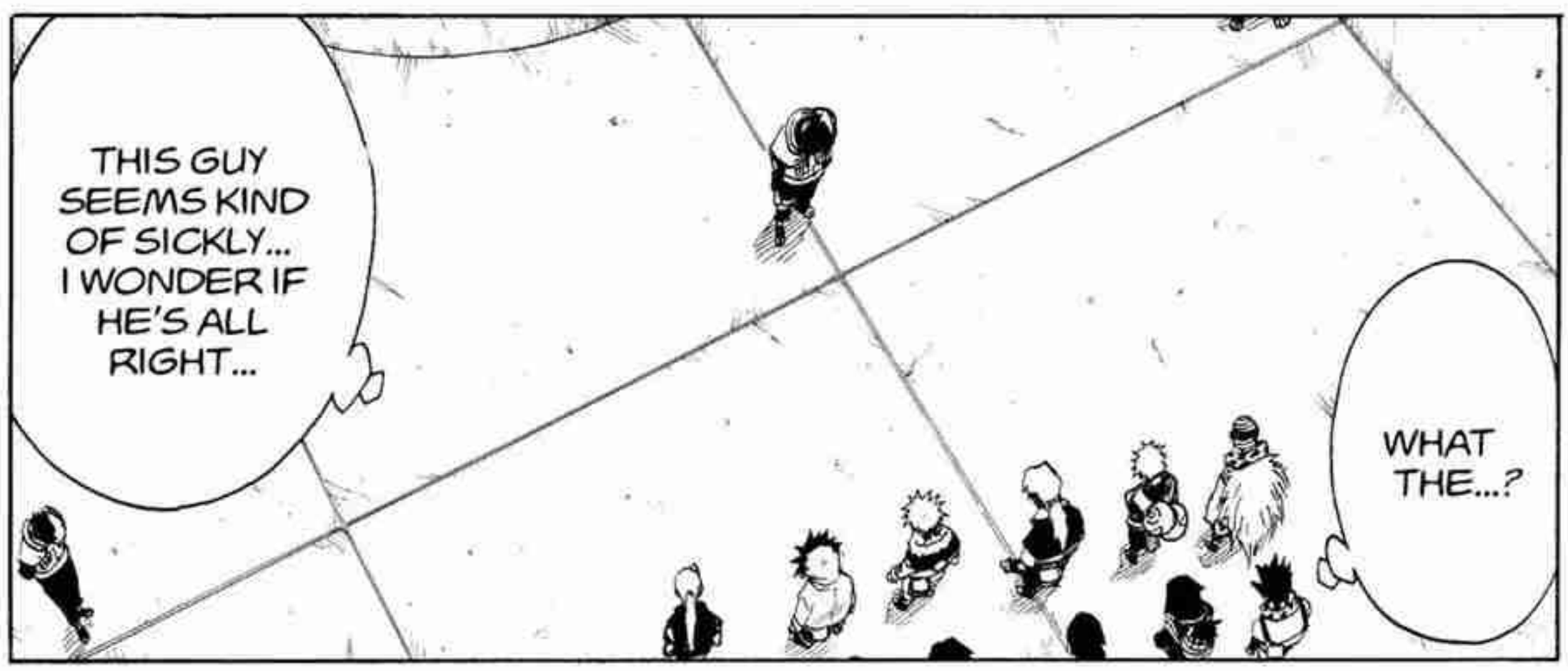
...
GO AHEAD.

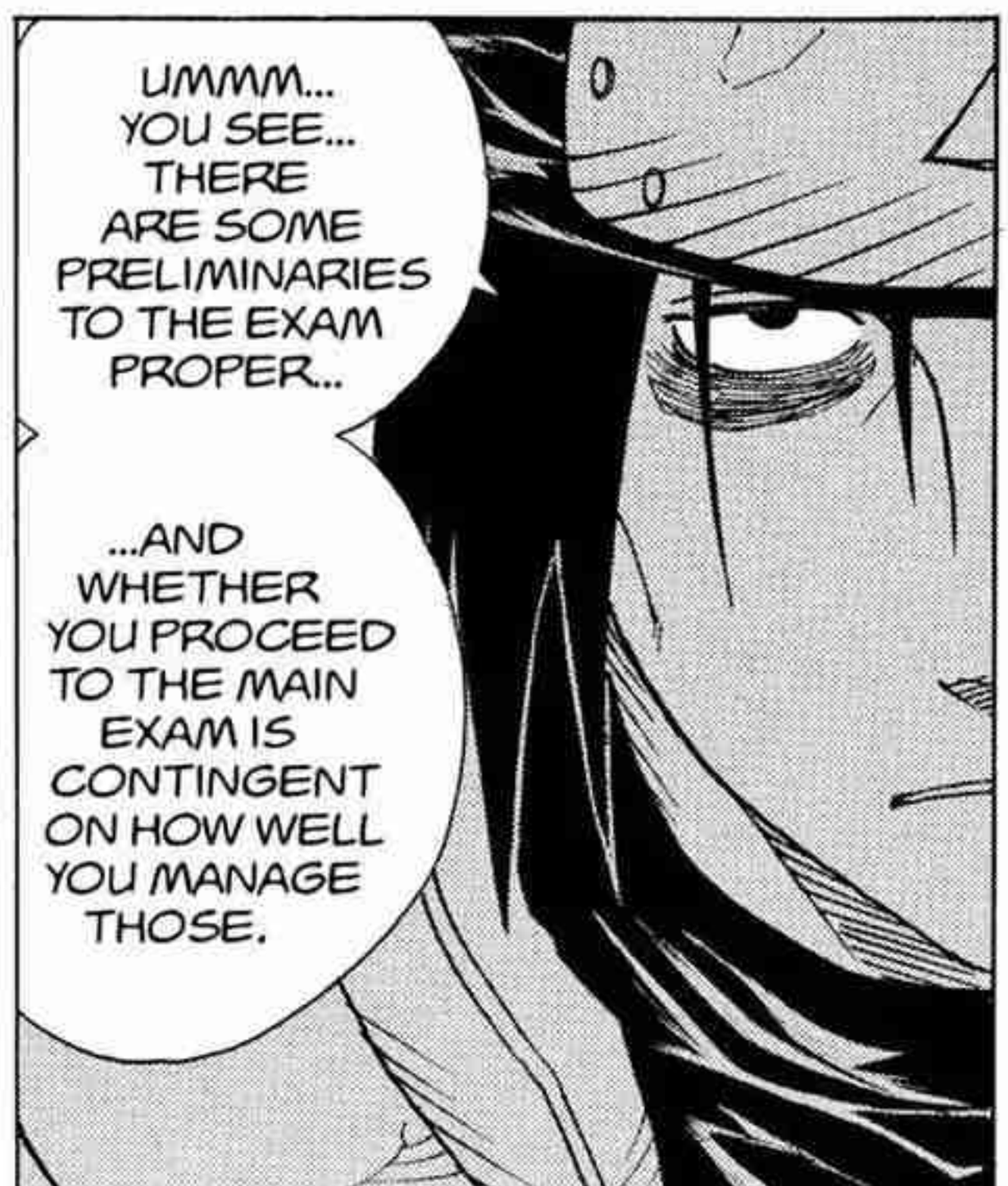
...I MUST ASK YOU ALL TO DO SOMETHING FOR ME...

KOFF

KOFF

UHHH... BEFORE WE START THE EXAM...





WHY CAN'T ALL OF THE REMAINING APPLICANTS JUST PROCEED DIRECTLY TO THE NEXT EXAM?

MASTER HAYATE... I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU MEAN BY PRELIMINARIES.

LIKE WHAT?!

PRELIM-INARIES ...?

...WE STILL HAVE TOO MANY APPLICANTS.

KOFF

WELL... I DON'T WANT TO SAY THAT THE FIRST TWO EXAMS WEREN'T DEMANDING ENOUGH... BUT THE TRUTH IS...

AS LORD HOKAGE MENTIONED, A NUMBER OF HONORED GUESTS WILL BE OBSERVING YOU DURING THE THIRD EXAM...

...SO WE MUST MAKE THE EXAM INTENSE, TIGHT, AND FAST-MOVING.

...TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF APPLICANTS WHO'LL PROCEED TO THE THIRD EXAM.

UNDER THE TRADITIONAL RULES OF THE EXAM, WE HAVE TO HAVE A PRELIMINARY TEST...

B-BUT...

KOFF
KOFF
BECAUSE THE PRELIMINARIES START... RIGHT NOW!
HMMM... SO ANYWAY... NOW THAT YOU KNOW SOMETHING OF WHAT IT'S REALLY ALL ABOUT...
...ANYONE WHO DOESN'T FEEL UP TO THE CHALLENGE, EITHER PHYSICALLY OR MENTALLY, CAN WALK AWAY. JUST TAKE ONE STEP FORWARD...

HEH!

...I'M OUTTA HERE.
WELL...

K-KABUTO...?!

WHAT?!
!!

Number 66: Sakura's Advice

AREN'T YOU... YAKUSHI KABUTO OF KONOHA...?

OKAY. YOU CAN GO.

KOFF

KOFF

UMMM...

...NOT AS MEMBERS OF TEAMS. SO YOU CAN MAKE THE DECISION THAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU WITHOUT WORRYING ABOUT ANYONE ELSE.

SO... ANYONE ELSE WANT OUT? SHOW OF HANDS...?

KOFF

KOFF

UHHH... IN CASE I FORGOT TO MENTION IT, FROM HERE ON IN, YOU FIGHT AS INDIVIDUALS...

...!!

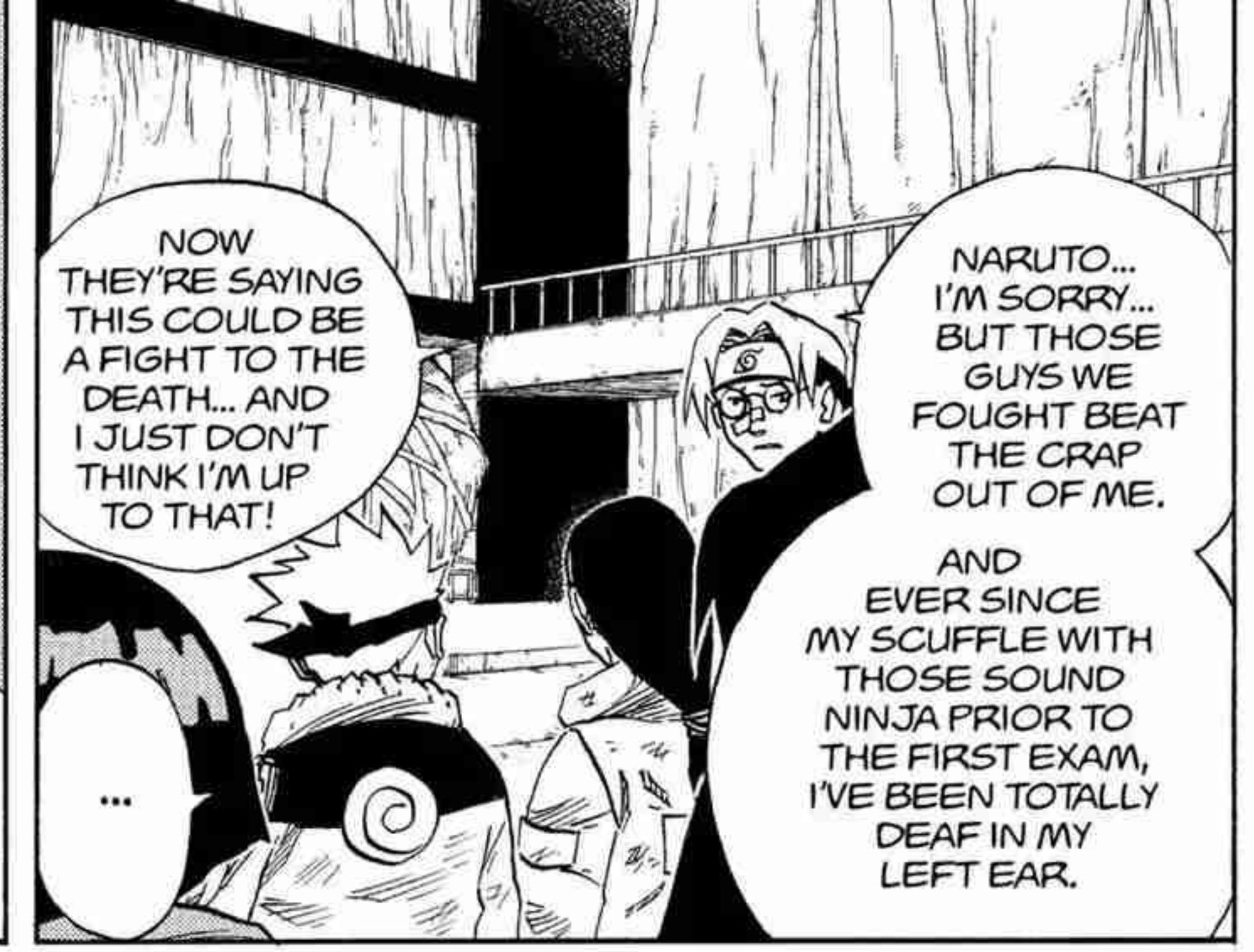
愛

...

...!

HEY! KABUTO!! WHAT'S UP WITH YOU QUITTING?!

...


NOW THEY'RE SAYING THIS COULD BE A FIGHT TO THE DEATH... AND I JUST DON'T THINK I'M UP TO THAT!
...
NARUTO... I'M SORRY... BUT THOSE GUYS WE FOUGHT BEAT THE CRAP OUT OF ME.
AND EVER SINCE MY SCUFFLE WITH THOSE SOUND NINJA PRIOR TO THE FIRST EXAM, I'VE BEEN TOTALLY DEAF IN MY LEFT EAR.

SIGH...

WHAT SORT OF RECORD HAS HE GOT?

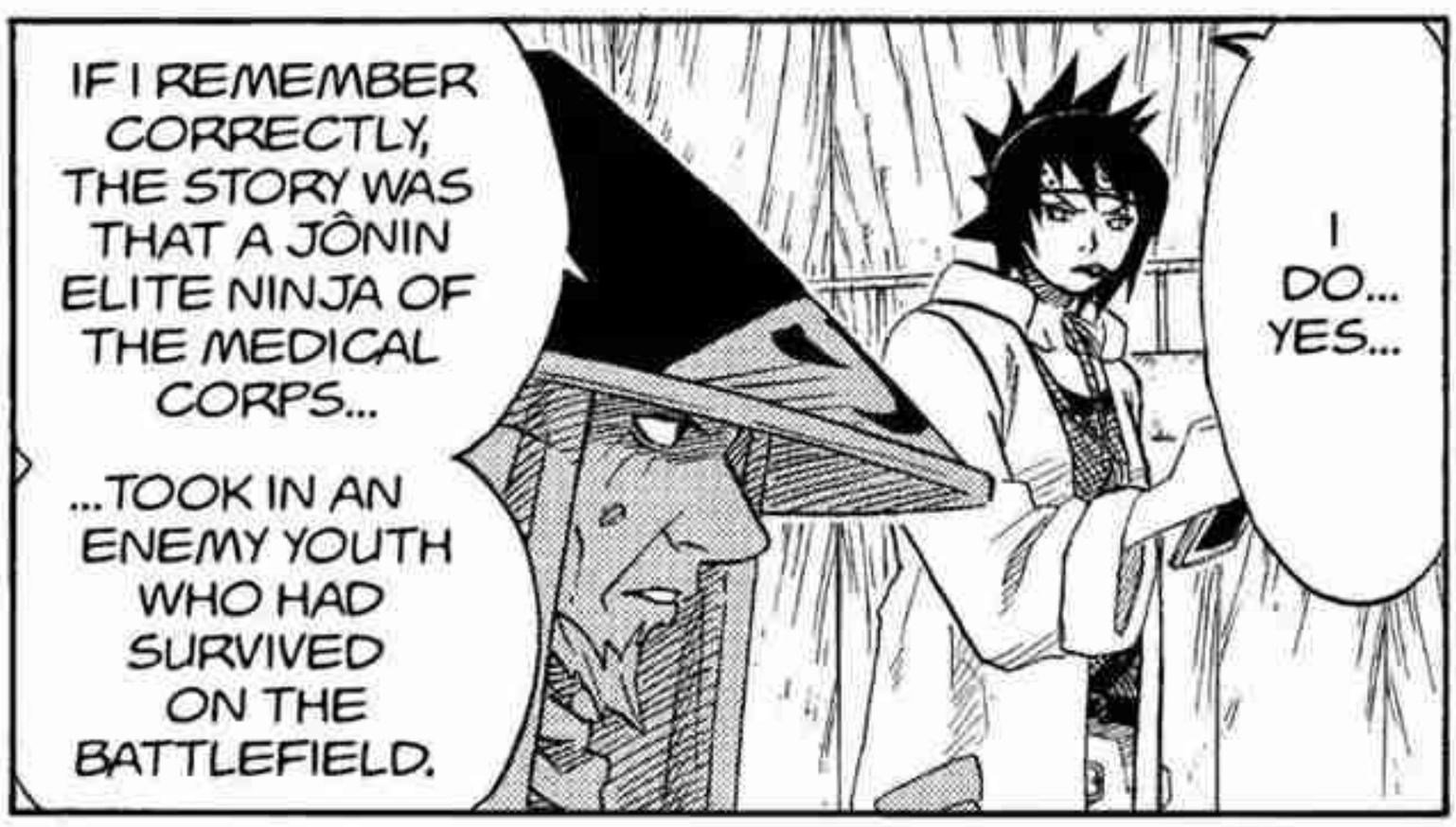
I WONDER... WHAT ON EARTH COULD HE BE THINKING?
IF MEMORY SERVES ME, THIS IS ABOUT THE SAME POINT AT WHICH HE DROPPED OUT LAST TIME...
...WELL, THERE'S A FAMILIAR FACE, EH?
...HE'S TRIED AND FAILED SIX TIMES NOW.
YAKUSHI KABUTO... ACCORDING TO HIS DOSSIER...

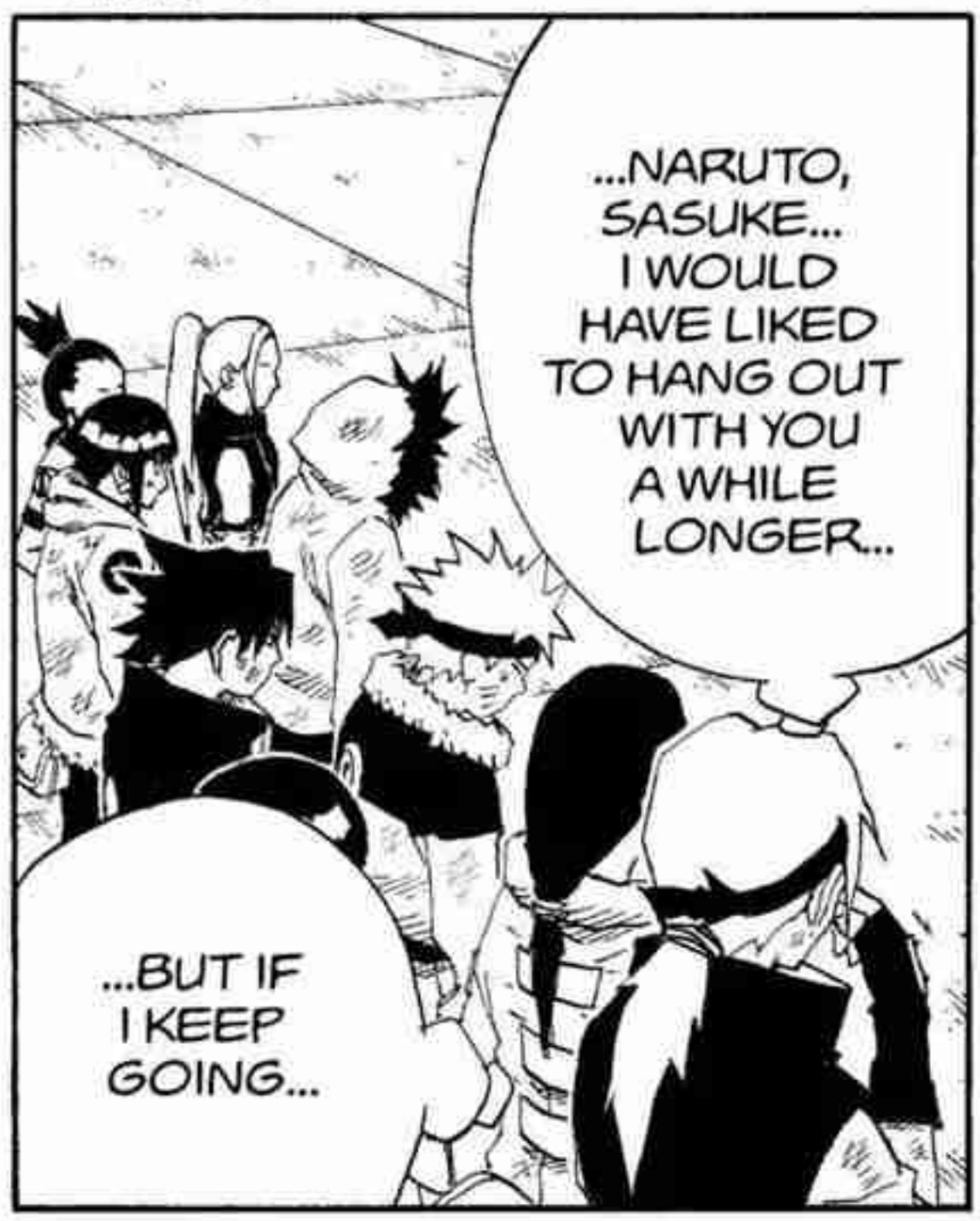
SINCE THEN, HE'S COMPLETED TWO C-RANKED AND 14 D-RANKED MISSIONS.

THERE'S NOTHING NOTEWORTHY IN THE RECORDS OF ANY OF HIS BATTLES...

ORDINARY... UNREMARKABLE. IN HIS ACADEMY DAYS, HE WAS AN AVERAGE STUDENT, EARNING MEDIOCRE GRADES...

IT TOOK HIM THREE ATTEMPTS TO PASS HIS FINALS AND GRADUATE.




...NARUTO, SASUKE... I WOULD HAVE LIKED TO HANG OUT WITH YOU A WHILE LONGER...
...BUT IF I KEEP GOING...

I WISH I COULD TELL YOU, "JUST LEAVE EVERYTHING TO ME"...
YOU SEEM VERY DEDICATED.

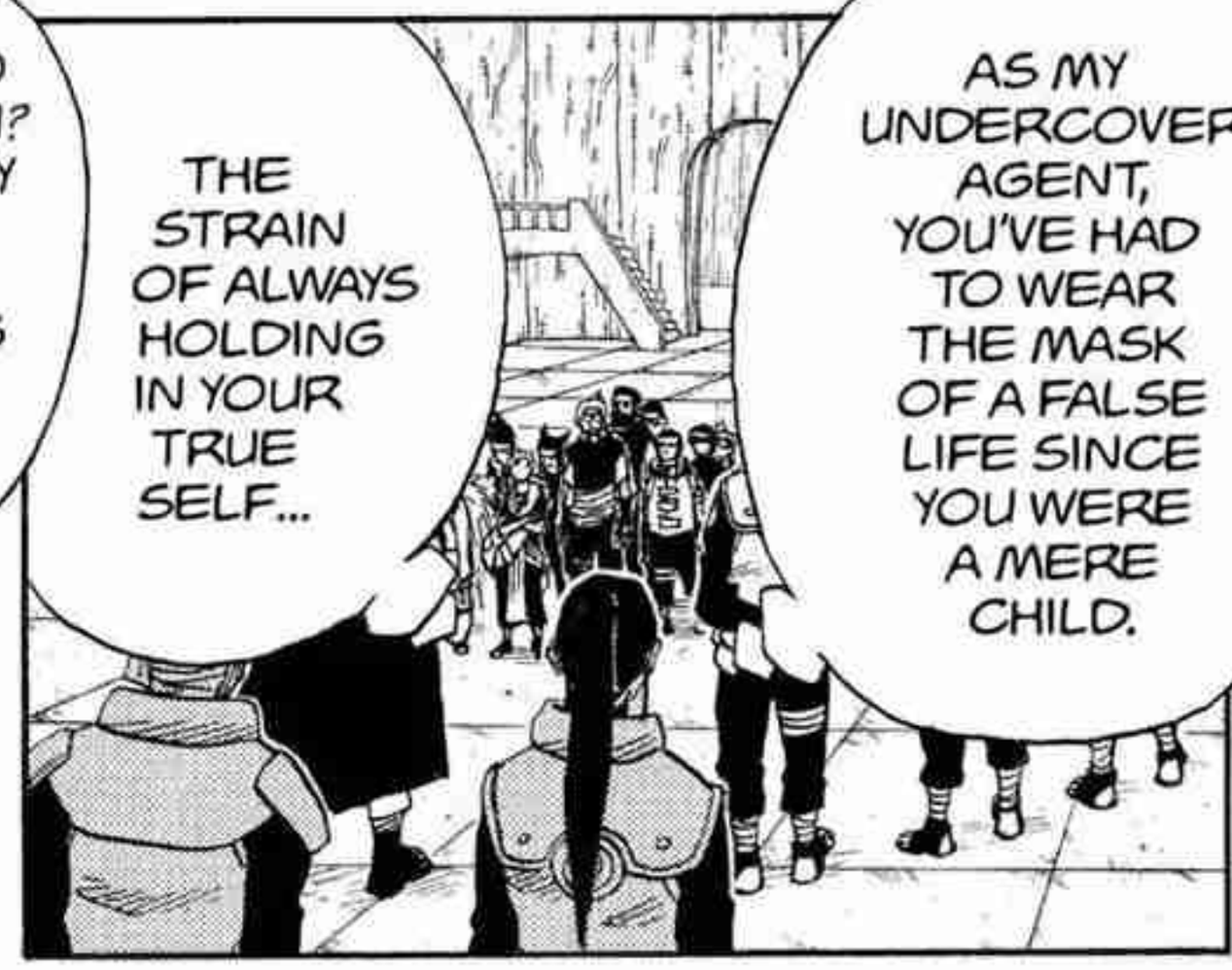
SHOVE
...MY OLD BLOOD MIGHT START BUBBLING UP...
HEH...

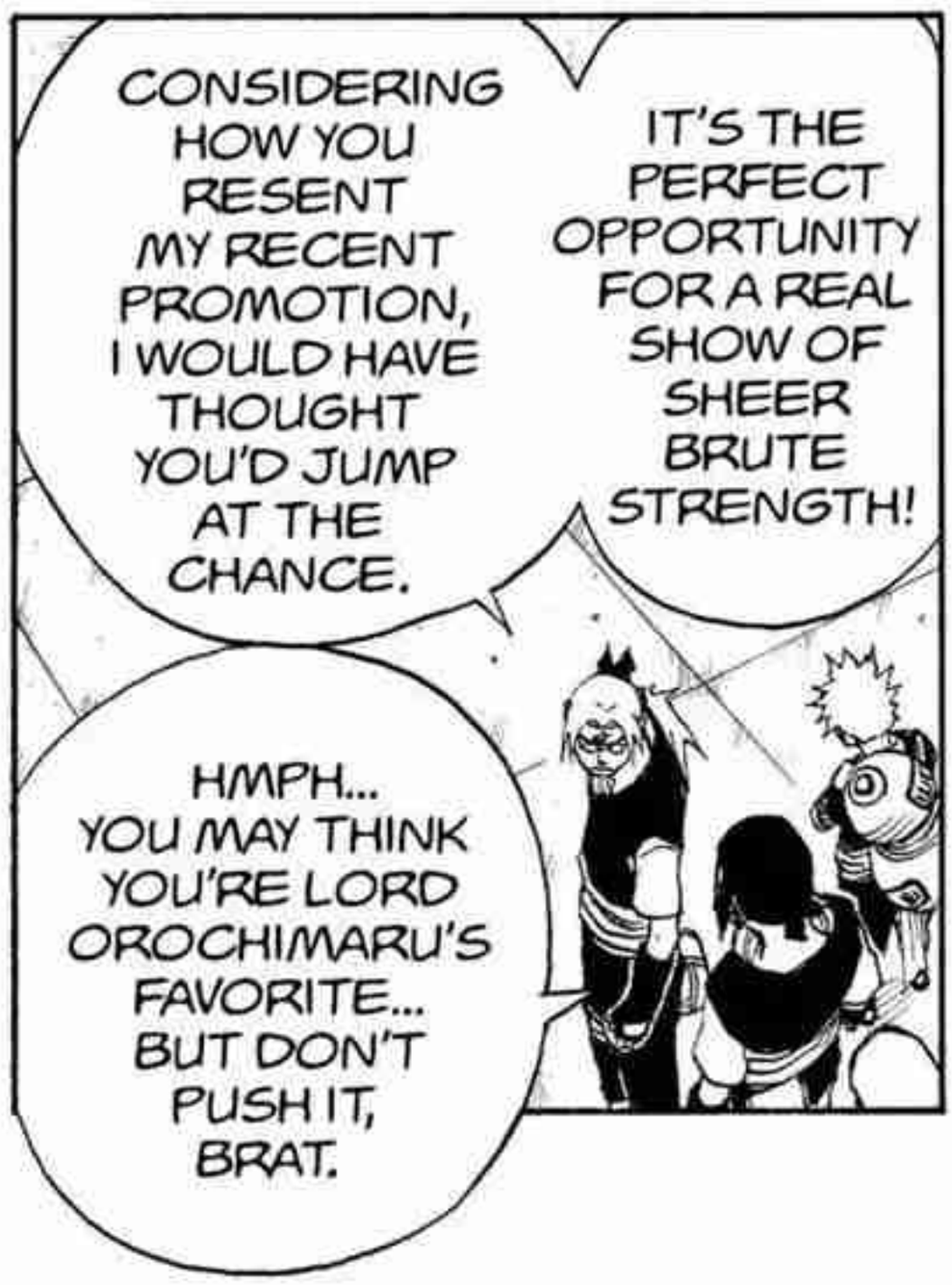
IF YOU'RE GOING TO BE A MEMBER OF THE AUDIENCE...
BESIDES, THIS IS PERFECT...

FUN'S FUN, BUT TECHNICALLY I'M A SPY HERE...
AND NOW IS HARDLY THE TIME TO BLOW MY COVER.

...LORD OROCHIMARU!

...THEN I CAN HAND OFF THE INTELLIGENCE-GATHERING WORK TO YOU...





I GOT IT...
LOUD AND CLEAR, COACH!
...
SKFF

...

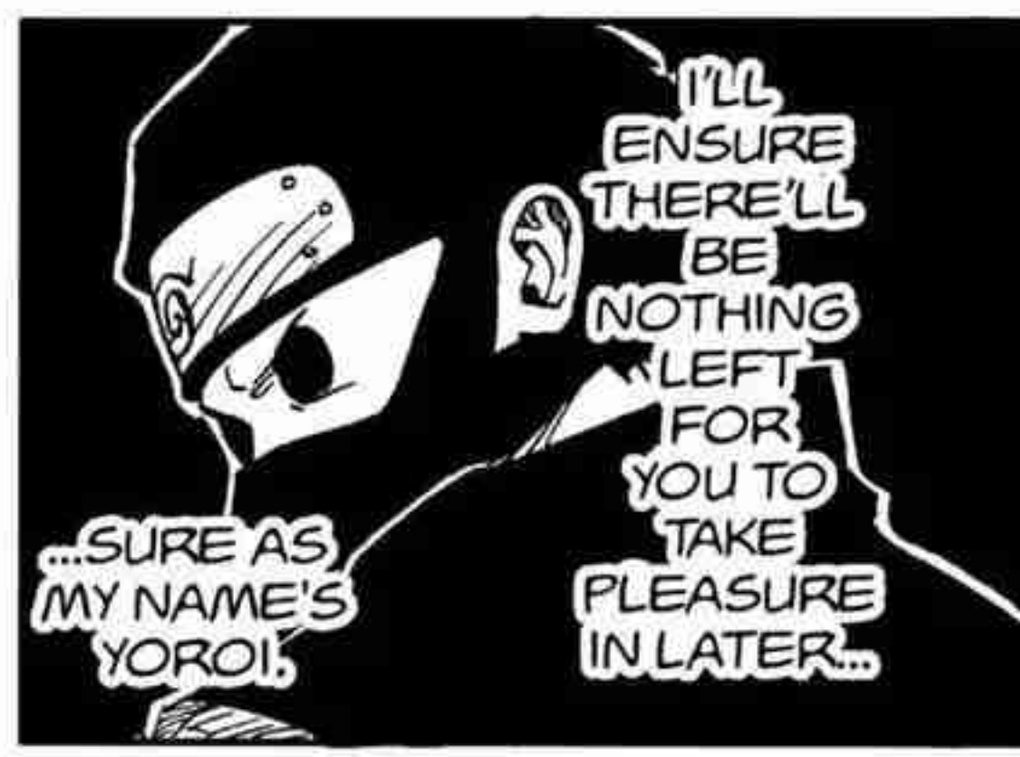
TAK
TAK

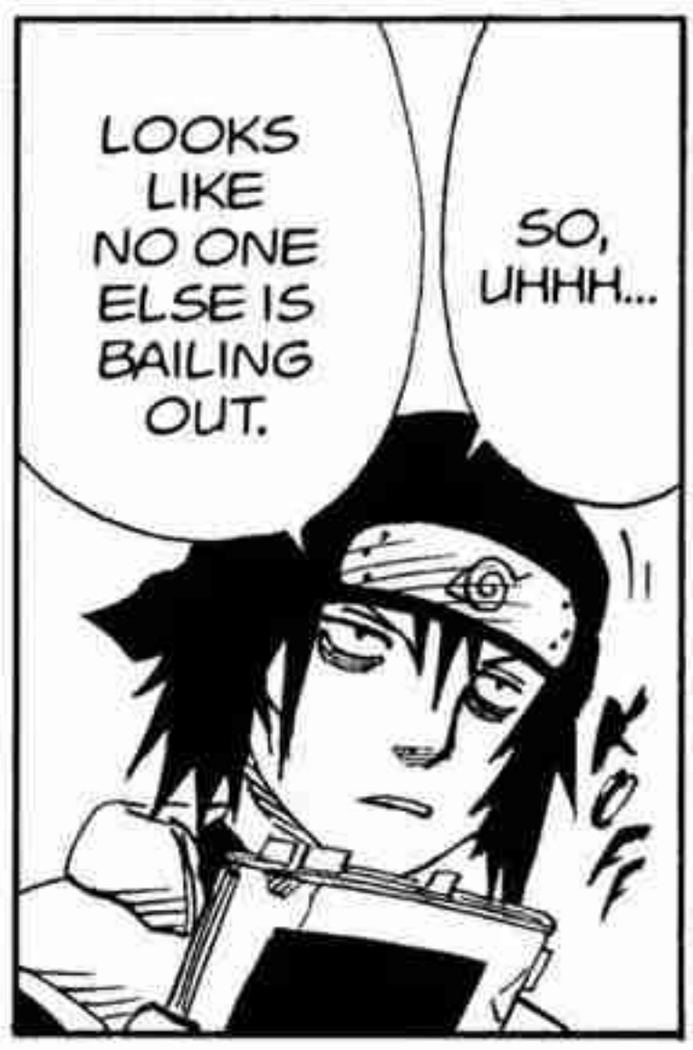
HEH!

TOK

YOU TOO, NARUTO.

I LOOK FORWARD WITH PLEASURE TO THE DAY OF OUR NEXT MEETING, SASUKE...





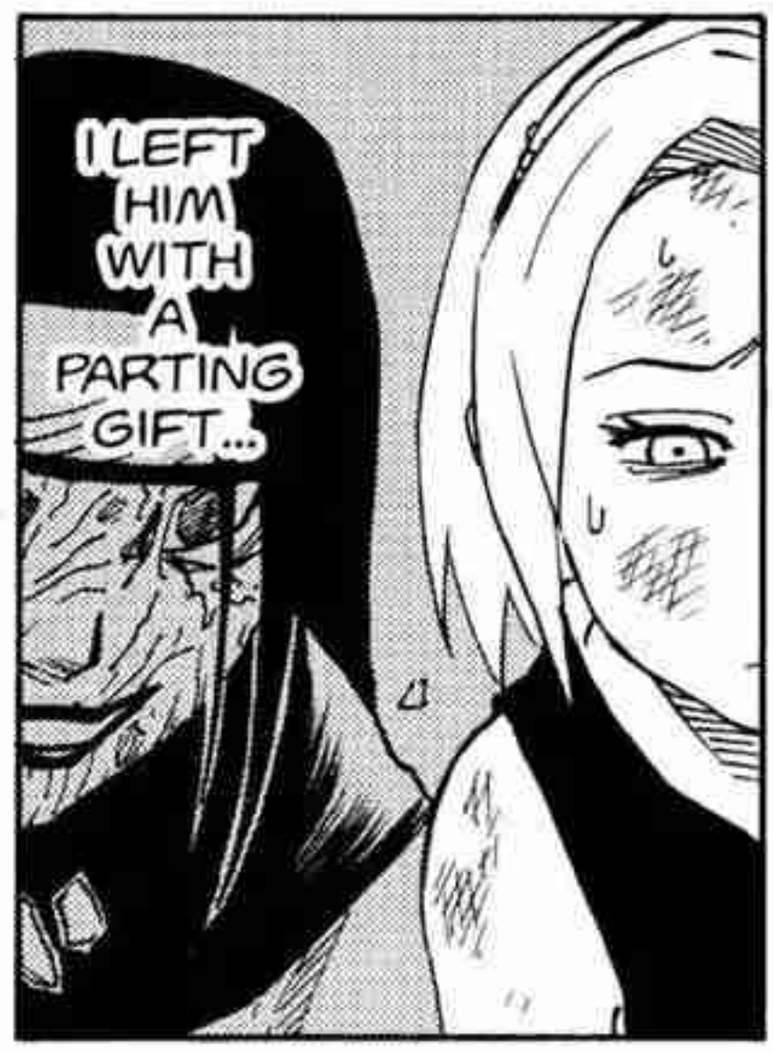
?!
HUNH?!

OWW...
HUNH?!

MAYBE YOU SHOULD QUIT, TOO!
S-SASUKE...

AND IT JUST KEEPS GETTING WORSE!!
THAT MARK ON YOUR SKIN IS HURTING AGAIN, ISN'T IT?
EVER SINCE THAT OROCHIMARU ATTACKED YOU, YOU HAVEN'T BEEN YOURSELF!!
WHAT MARK...?

...IN THE QUEST FOR POWER.
EVENTUALLY, SASUKE WILL BE FORCED TO SEEK ME OUT...


I LEFT HIM WITH A PARTING GIFT...

LUB
DUB

...
PLEASE...

...PLEASE WITHDRAW...
SOB
I... I'M AFRAID...

YOU'RE IN NO SHAPE TO FIGHT, SASUKE!

POOR SAKURA!

...

...THAT YOU'VE BARELY BEEN ABLE TO CONTAIN THE PAIN ALL THIS TIME!
SASUKE, I KNOW...

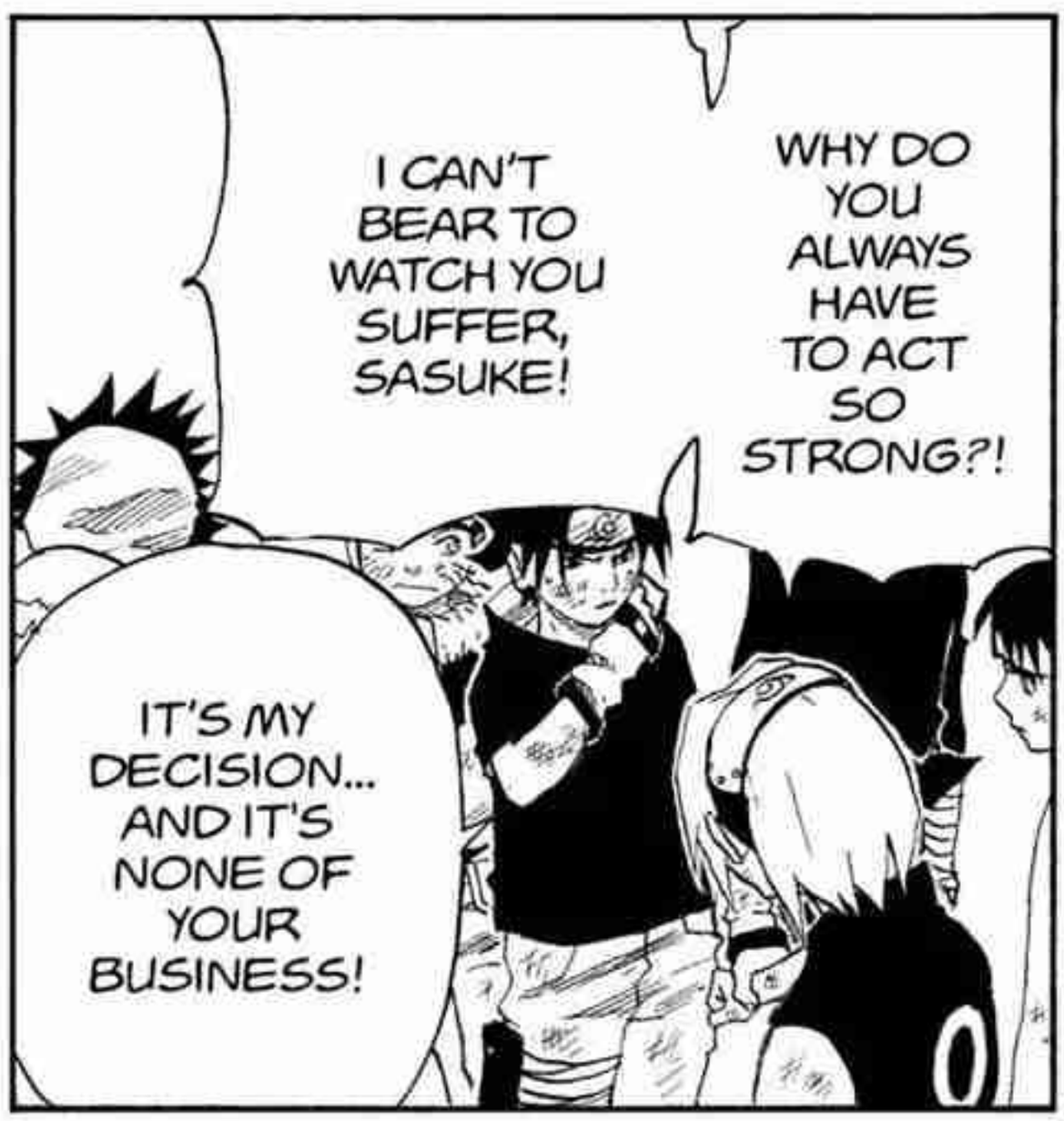
SHUT UP...!!

I'M GOING TO TELL ALL THE TEACHERS ABOUT THAT MARK! AND THEN...
YOU LEAVE ME NO CHOICE. IF YOU WON'T LISTEN TO REASON...

I SAID...

KLAT
SHF
!

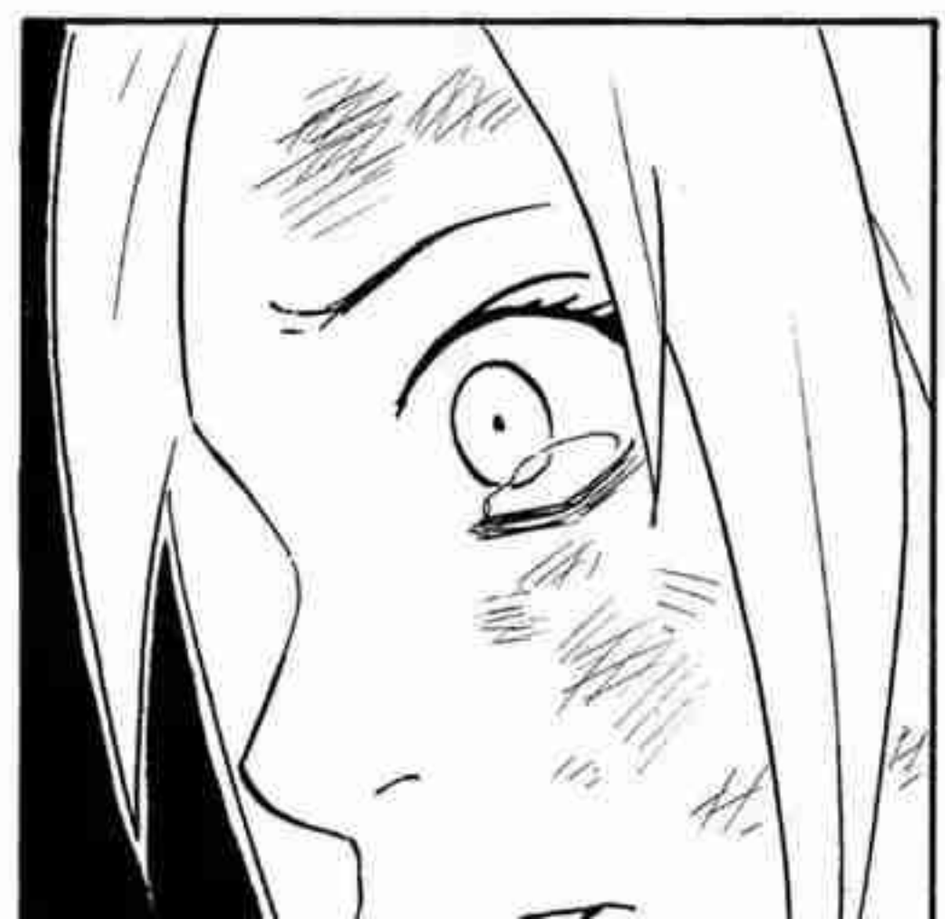
-SOB-


I CAN'T BEAR TO WATCH YOU SUFFER, SASUKE!
WHY DO YOU ALWAYS HAVE TO ACT SO STRONG?!
IT'S MY DECISION... AND IT'S NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS!

KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT! NOT A WORD ABOUT THE MARK!

THIS PAIN IS MY BURDEN TO BEAR... ALONE.
!!

...!!

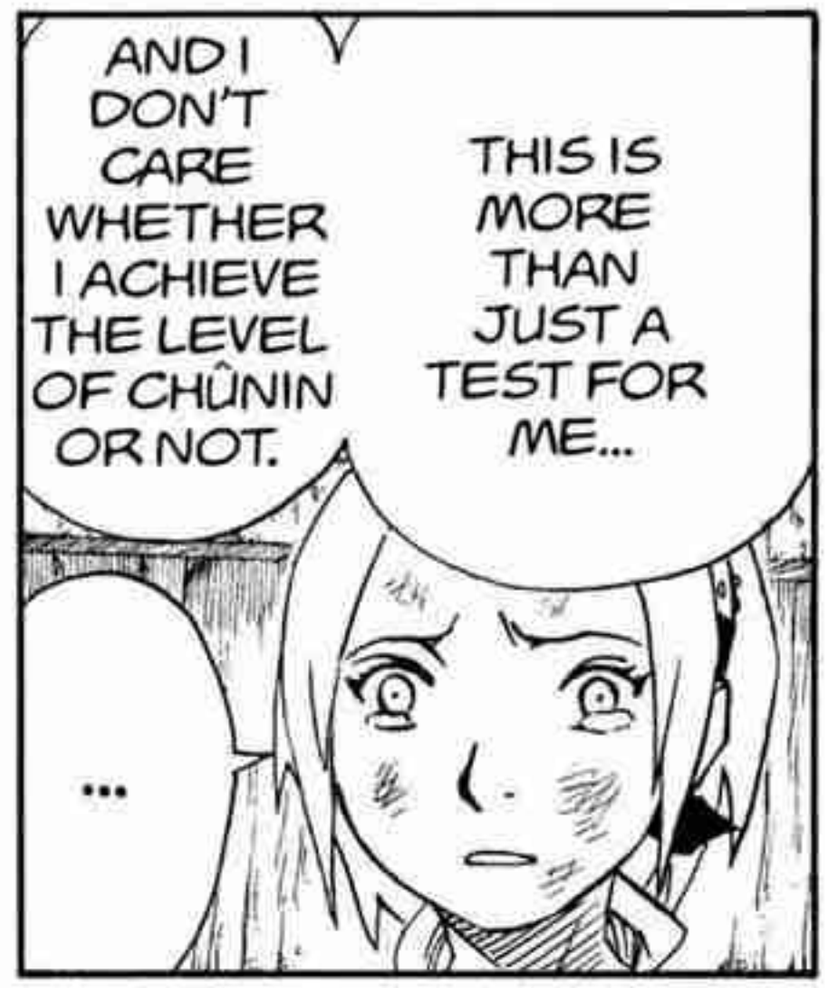


I'M AN AVENGER.

REMEMBER WHAT I TOLD YOU, SAKURA...?
?

"AM I STRONG?" FINDING THAT OUT IS ALL THAT MATTERS TO ME NOW.
I'M HERE TO TEST MYSELF AGAINST THE BEST OF THE BEST.

?!


AND I DON'T CARE WHETHER I ACHIEVE THE LEVEL OF CHÛNIN OR NOT.
THIS IS MORE THAN JUST A TEST FOR ME...
...

WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
AND THE BEST OPPONENTS I COULD FIND ARE ALL AROUND US, HERE AND NOW.
...
I GIVE YOU MY WORD, ON BEHALF OF US ALL, THAT IF YOU LET US GO NOW...

SAKURA IS WORRIED SICK ABOUT YOU! DON'T YOU CARE?!

HEY, IDIOT! WHY THE HECK ARE YOU TRYING TO ACT SO COOL?!

NARUTO...

...WILL I TURN AWAY FROM THE PATH THAT LEADS TO MY DREAM!

NOT EVEN FOR YOUR SAKE...

YOU'RE ONE OF THE ONES I WANT TO FIGHT...

...!!

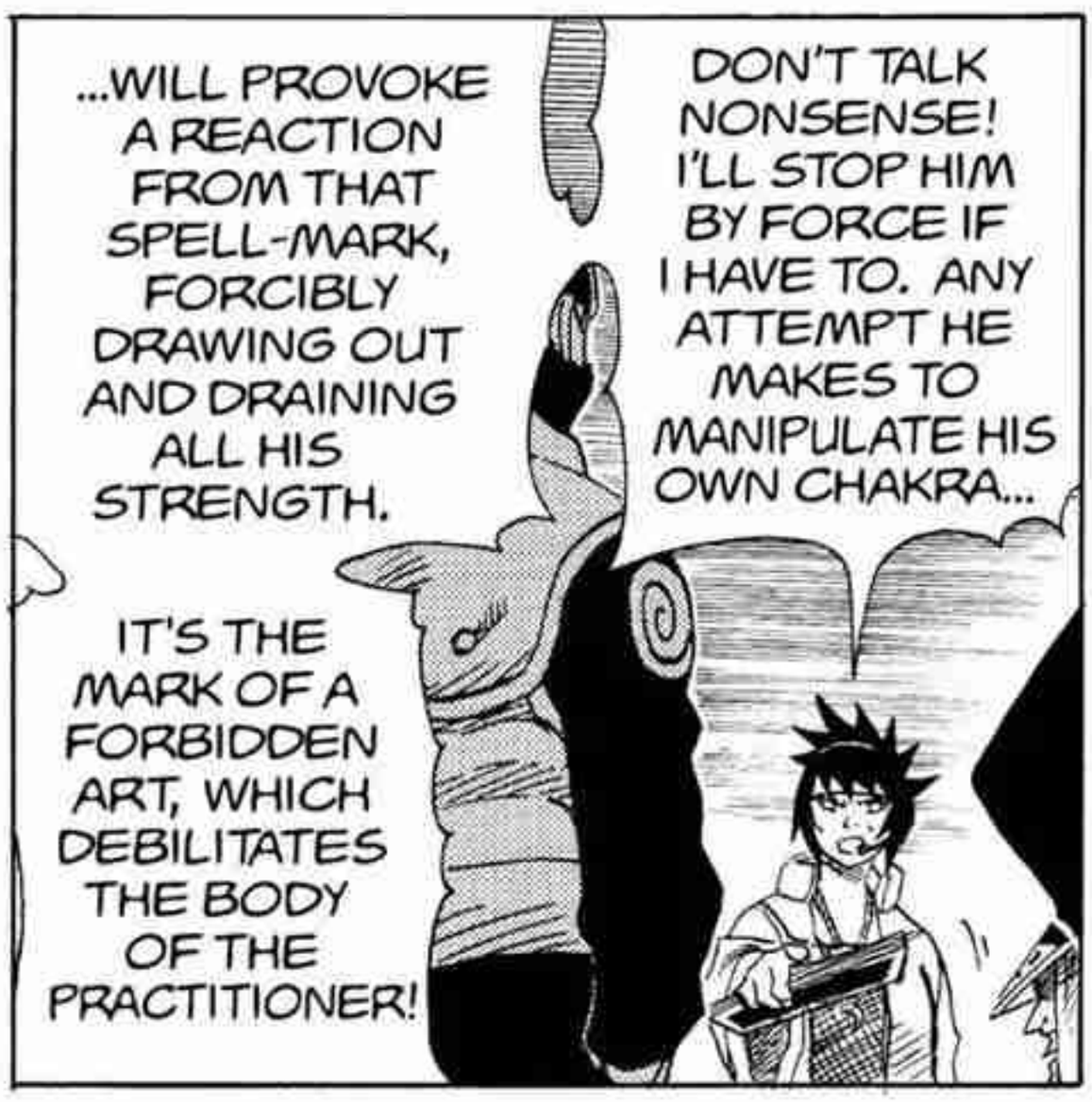
LUB DUB PULSE

IT'S JUST AS I'D FEARED...

WHAT CAN WE DO?

OHH!!

!
QUARANTINE HIM UNDER THE GUARD OF BLACK OPS AGENTS.
PULL HIM OUT OF THE EXAM...
AND YOU REALLY THINK HE'LL JUST GO QUIETLY IF YOU ORDER THAT?


...WILL PROVOKE A REACTION FROM THAT SPELL-MARK, FORCIBLY DRAWING OUT AND DRAINING ALL HIS STRENGTH.
IT'S THE MARK OF A FORBIDDEN ART, WHICH DEBILITATES THE BODY OF THE PRACTITIONER!
DON'T TALK NONSENSE! I'LL STOP HIM BY FORCE IF I HAVE TO. ANY ATTEMPT HE MAKES TO MANIPULATE HIS OWN CHAKRA...

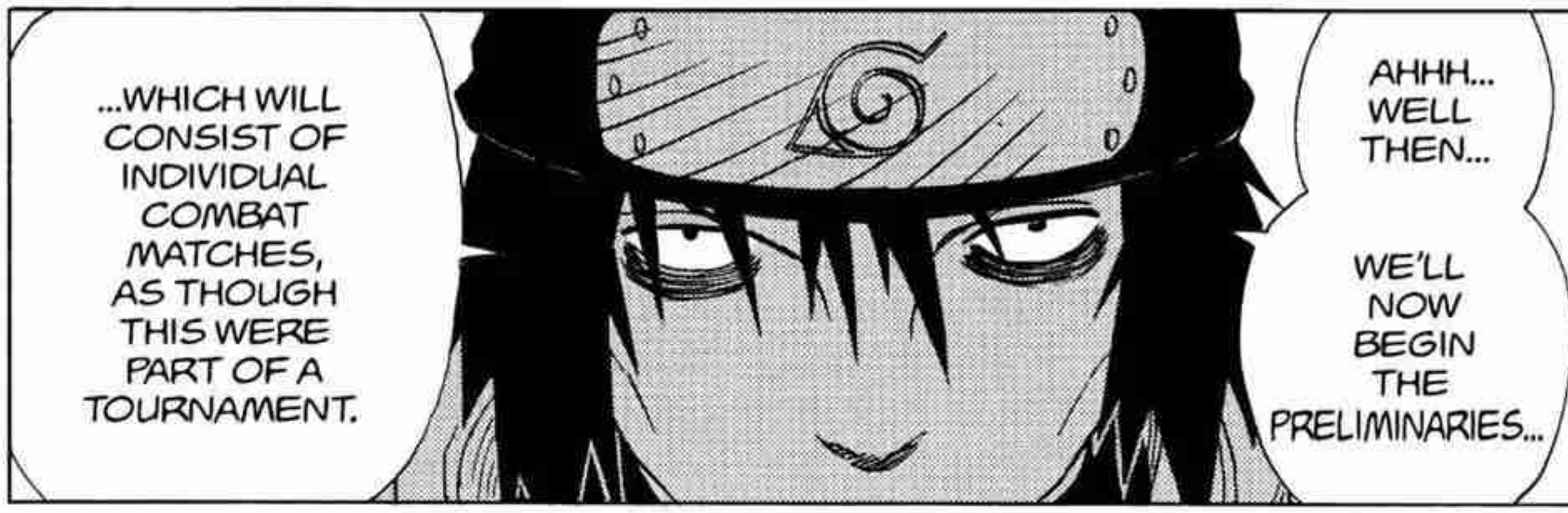
...HE'S A MEMBER OF THE UCHIHA CLAN.
KEEP IN MIND...

L-LORD HOKAGE...!!
I AM STILL CONCERNED ABOUT WHAT OROCHIMARU SAID...
LET YOUNG SASUKE PROCEED AS HE IS, AND WE SHALL KEEP OUR EYES ON HIM.

BY ALL RIGHTS, IT SHOULD HAVE KILLED HIM ALREADY.
IT'S A MIRACLE THAT A CHILD LIKE HIM IS ABLE TO BEAR IT AT ALL.

HMM!
MY LORD!

YES, SIR.
HOWEVER, IF THE CURSE-MARK BEGINS TO SPREAD AND CAUSE HIS POWER TO RAMPAGE, THEN WE SHALL INDEED TAKE STEPS TO RESTRAIN HIM.


...WHICH WILL CONSIST OF INDIVIDUAL COMBAT MATCHES, AS THOUGH THIS WERE PART OF A TOURNAMENT.
AHHH... WELL THEN...
WE'LL NOW BEGIN THE PRELIMINARIES...

UMMM... AND THE VICTORS OF THOSE BOUTS WILL ADVANCE TO THE THIRD EXAM.
AS THERE ARE A TOTAL OF 20 COMBATANTS REMAINING, WE WILL HOLD A TOTAL OF 10 BOUTS.

...WHERE WE ASCERTAIN THAT THERE IS AN UNDISPUTED WINNER AND STEP IN TO END THE MATCH.

BUT DON'T COUNT ON THAT.

UHHH... SINCE WE DON'T WANT A TOTAL BLOODBATH ON OUR HANDS, THERE MAY BE CASES...

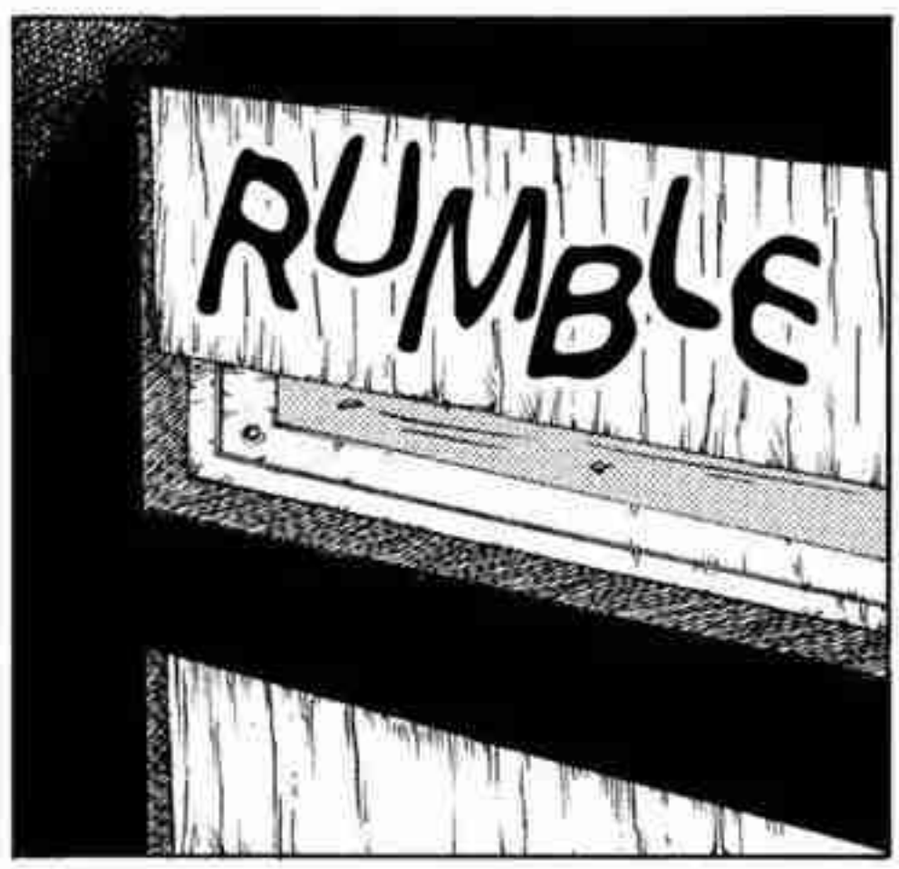
KOFF

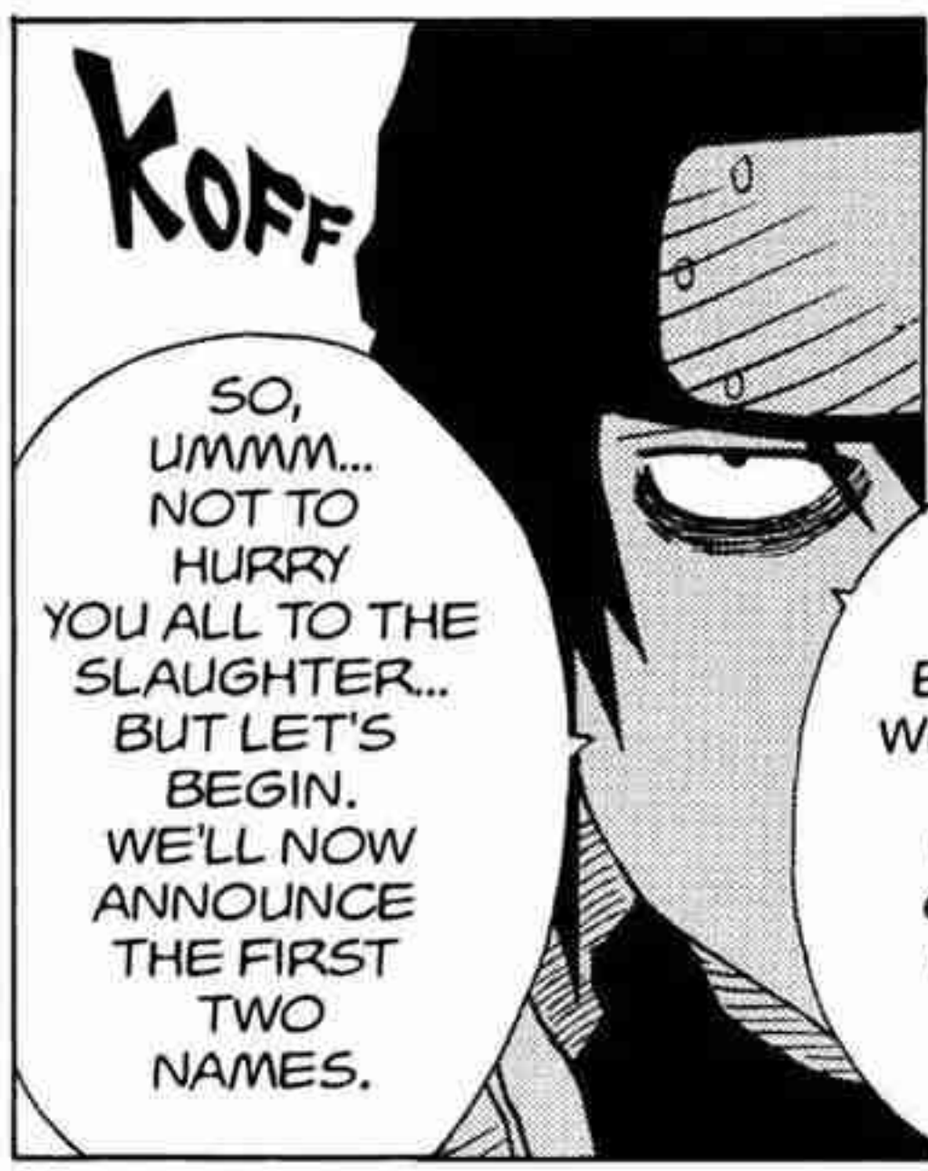
AS SOON AS YOU SENSE THAT YOUR OPPONENT IS OVER-POWERING YOU, IMMEDIATELY CONCEDE YOUR LOSS... IF YOU VALUE YOUR LIFE.

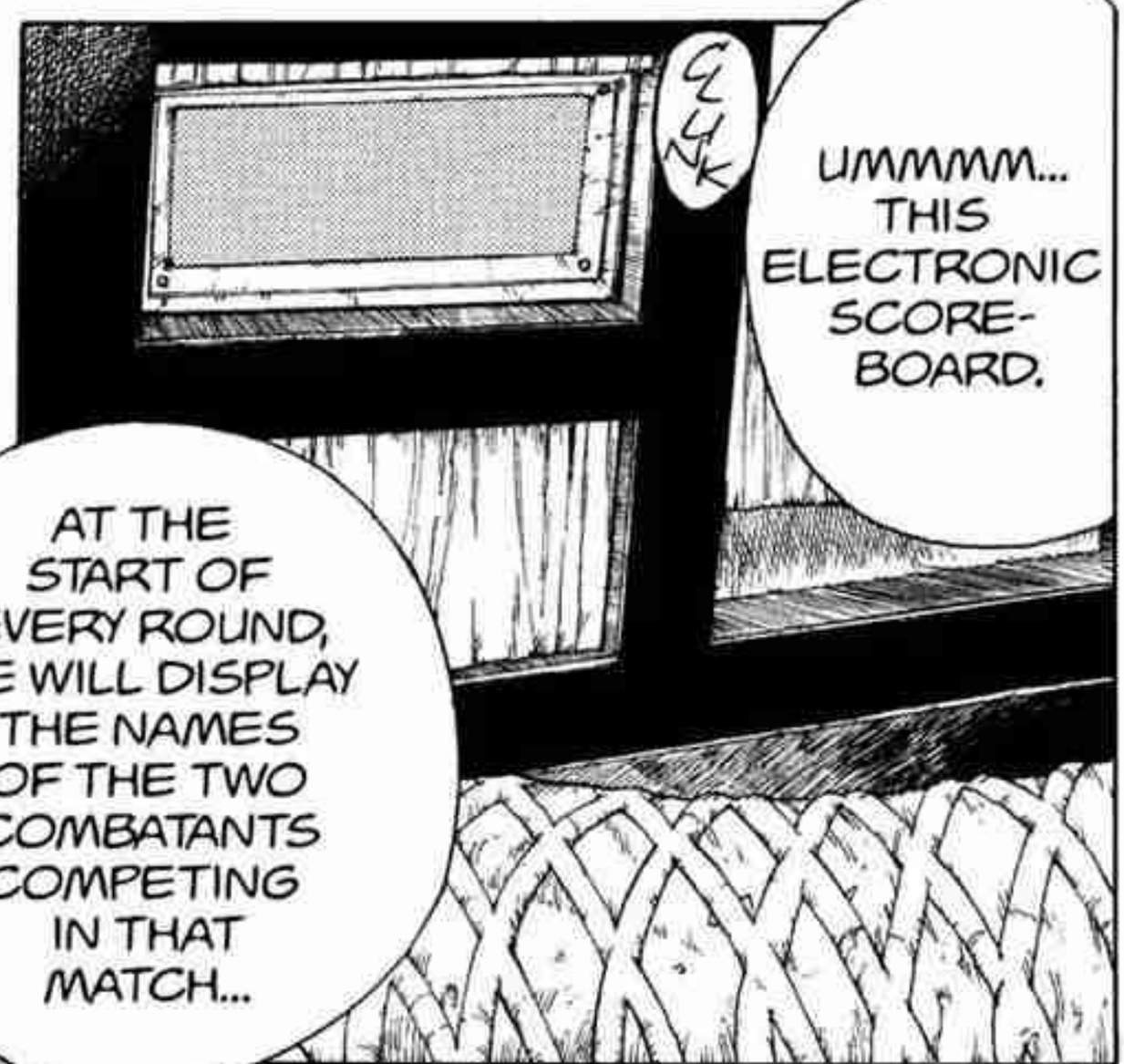
KOFF

THIS IS NO-HOLDS-BARRED COMBAT.

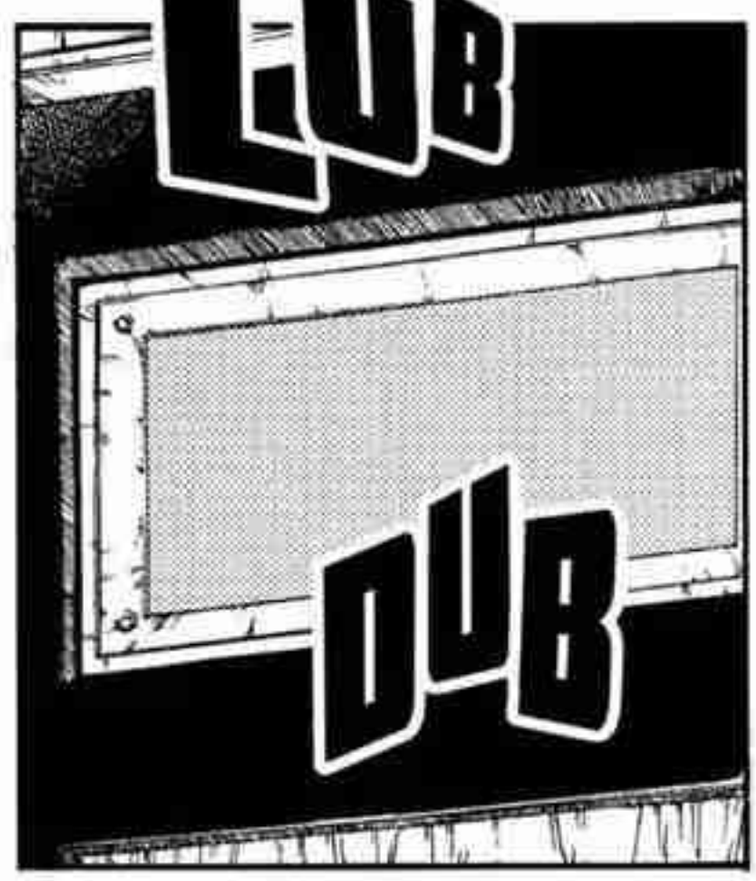
EACH PAIR OF COMBATANTS WILL FIGHT UNTIL ONE OF THEM IS DEAD OR UNCONSCIOUS... OR ADMITS DEFEAT.

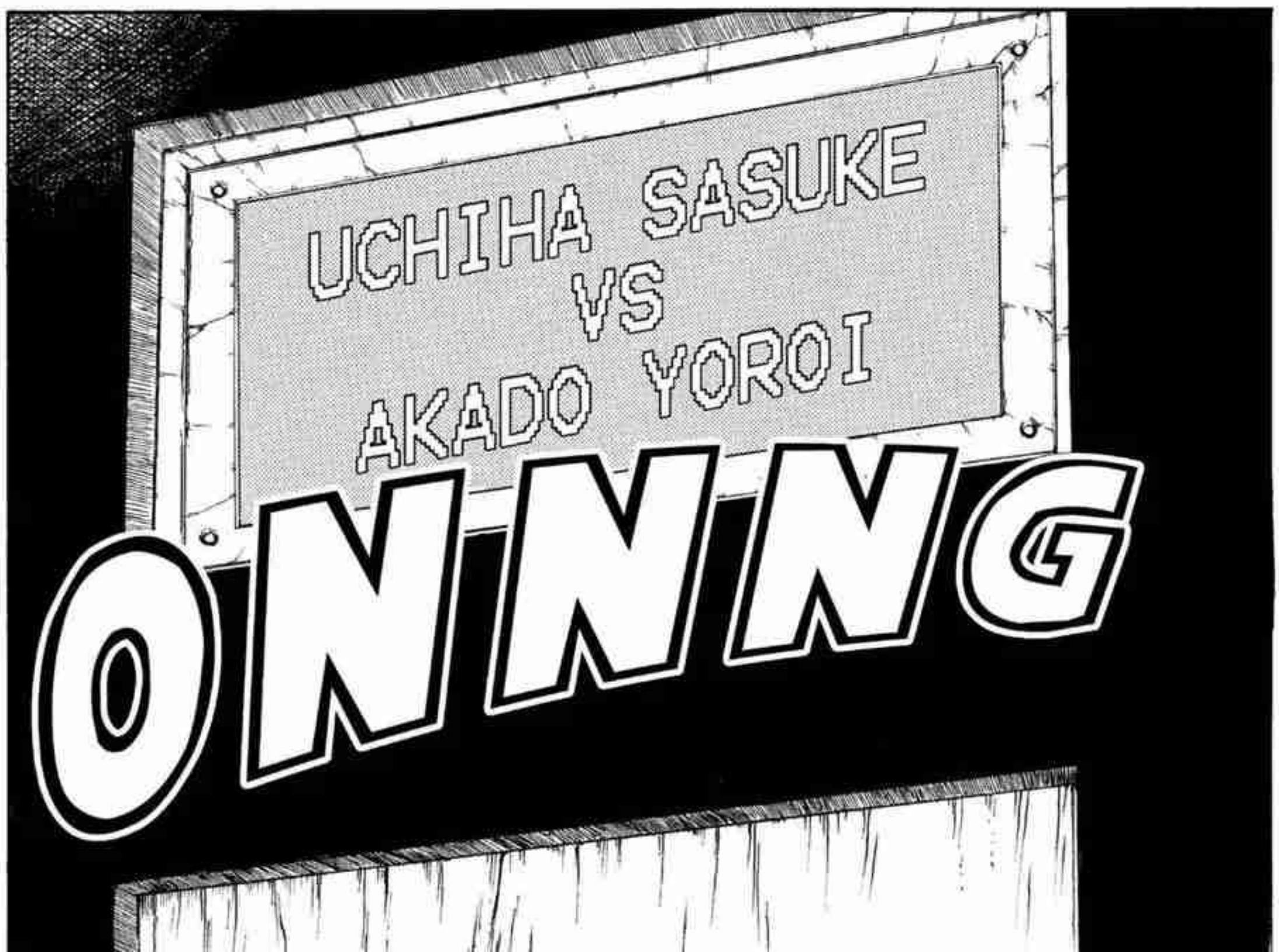






THUMP THUMP THUMP

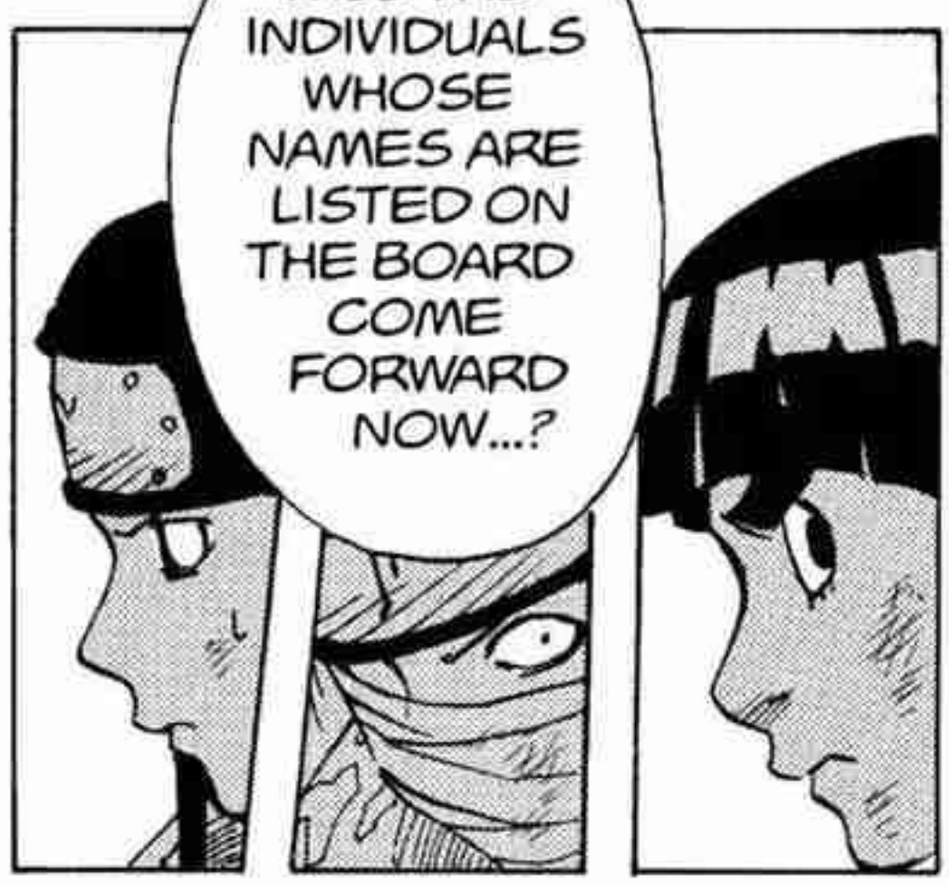




HEH...
I COULDN'T HAVE PLANNED IT BETTER!

RIGHT OFF THE BAT, EH?
PULSE

HMM...


WILL THE INDIVIDUALS WHOSE NAMES ARE LISTED ON THE BOARD COME FORWARD NOW...?

OH, PLEASE NO! NOT SASUKE!!

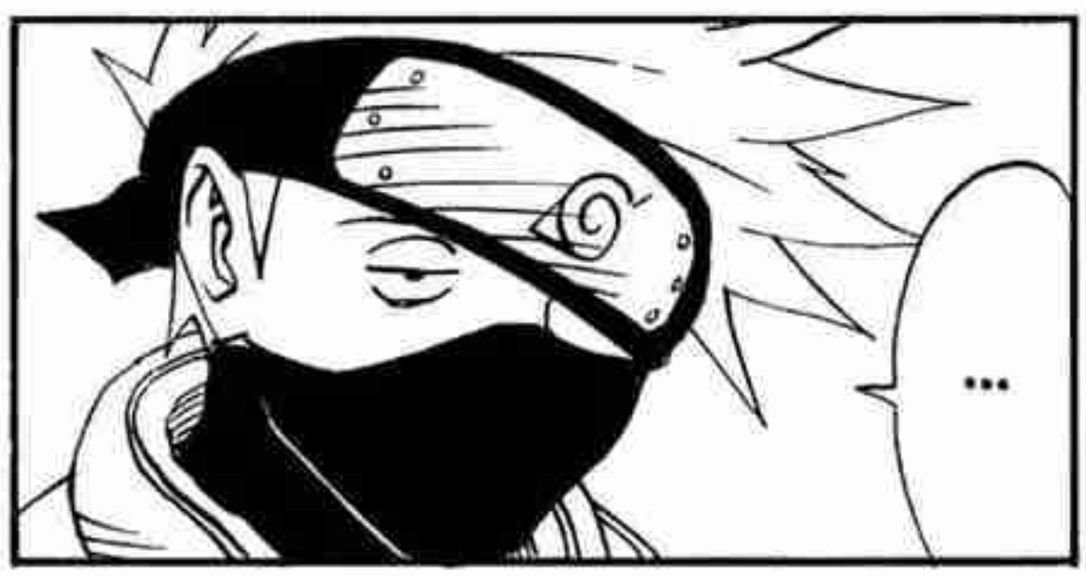
AKADO YOROI, UCHIHA SASUKE... YOU TWO HAVE BEEN SELECTED TO COMPETE IN THE FIRST BOUT. ANY OBJECTIONS?
I'M GOOD...
NONE...

THE WORLD OF KISHIMOTO MASASHI
MY PERSONAL HISTORY, PART 6

DURING MY LAST FEW YEARS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, I WAS COMPLETELY ADDICTED TO *DRAGON BALL*. I HAD NEVER BEEN SO INTO ANYTHING BEFORE, AND I REVERED TORIYAMA AKIRA LIKE A GOD. AT EVERY OPPORTUNITY THAT AROSE, I WOULD TRACE AND DRAW ALL OF THE CHARACTERS FROM *DRAGON BALL* AND PORE OVER MY FRIENDS' COPIES OF *SHONEN JUMP*, ALL SO I COULD SEE MORE *DRAGON BALL*. I WASN'T GETTING A SINGLE YEN IN ALLOWANCE AT THAT TIME -- THE ONLY MONEY I HAD WAS THE GIFTS OF CASH I'D GET ON NEW YEAR'S -- SO BUYING MY OWN COPIES WAS OUT OF THE QUESTION. BEING FORCED TO STRETCH OUT MY NEW YEAR'S MONEY TO LAST AN ENTIRE YEAR DIDN'T LEAVE ME ANY FUNDS FOR A WEEKLY PUBLICATION, EVEN ONE THAT ONLY COST 190 YEN PER ISSUE.

AT FIRST, *DRAGON BALL* WAS MY SOLE REASON FOR READING *JUMP*, BUT EVENTUALLY I BEGAN TO REALIZE HOW INTERESTING A NUMBER OF THE OTHER TITLES IN THE ANTHOLOGY WERE. I STARTED FOLLOWING *JOJO'S BIZARRE ADVENTURE*, *SAINT SEIYA (KNIGHTS OF THE ZODIAC)*, *HIGH SCHOOL KIMENGUMI* AND OTHERS, AND BECAME A FAN OF *JUMP* ITSELF. ONCE I REALIZED HOW FUNNY MANGA WERE AND HOW MUCH I LIKED THEM, I BEGAN TO ASPIRE TO BECOME A MANGA ARTIST... AND TO CREATE A SERIAL OF MY OWN THAT COULD APPEAR IN *JUMP*. AND I CLEARLY RECALL THAT THE FIRST MANGA I EVER DREW WAS "HIATARI-KUN," A SERIES ABOUT THE ADVENTURES OF A MYSTERIOUS YOUNG NINJA.

Number 67:
Unholy Gifts!


...

HEH HEH...

...IS JUST STAND HERE AND WATCH OVER HIM. SASUKE...!
THE ONLY THING I CAN DO NOW...

THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG WITH SASUKE...

SASUKE! IF YOU PLAN TO FIGHT ME LATER...
...DON'T YOU DARE LOSE NOW!!

愛
...

SHOW US WHAT YOU'RE MADE OF!

GOOD LUCK, SASUKE!!

...IT'S THE CURSE-MARK THAT'S CAUSING IT!

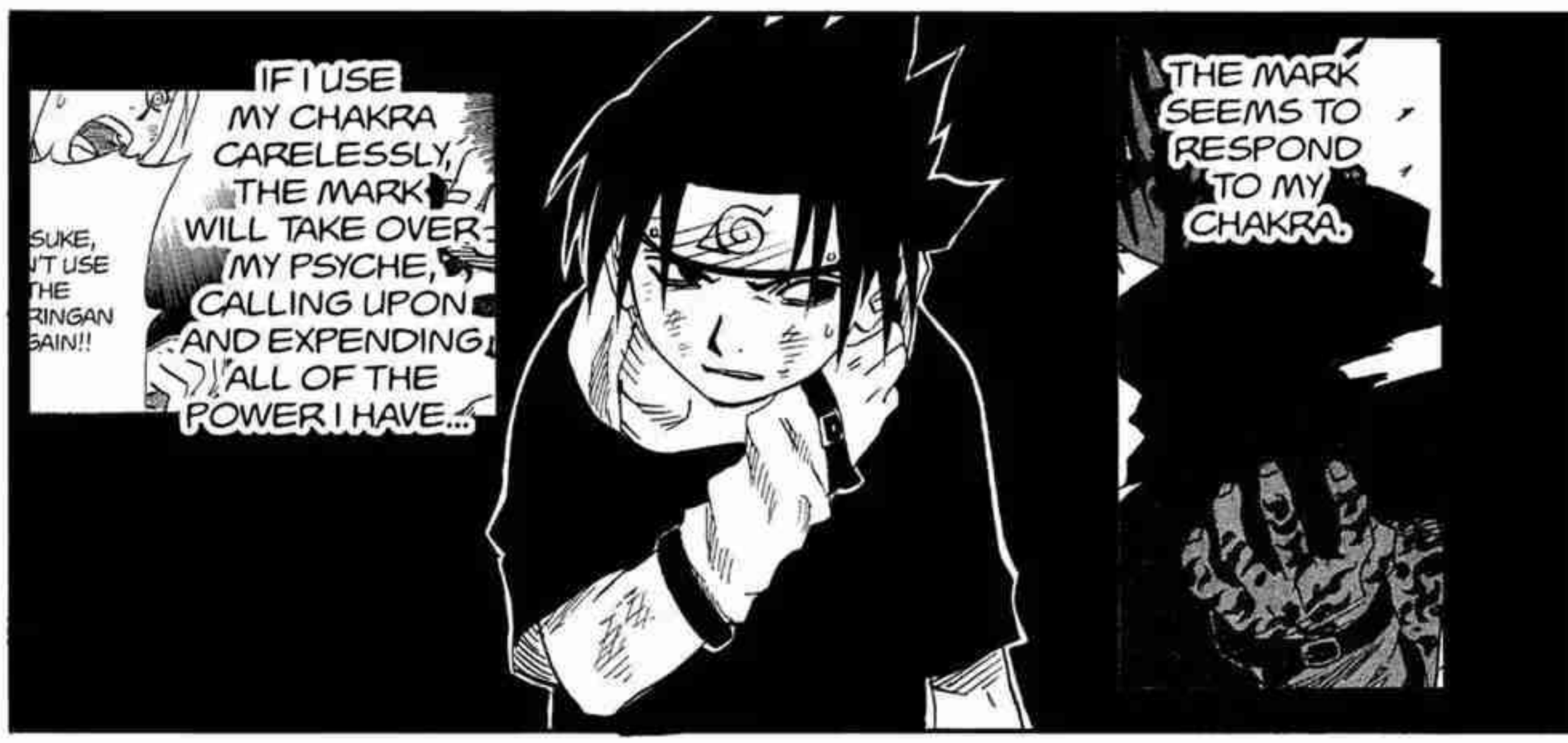
HEH... LOOKS LIKE THE BOY'S IN PAIN!

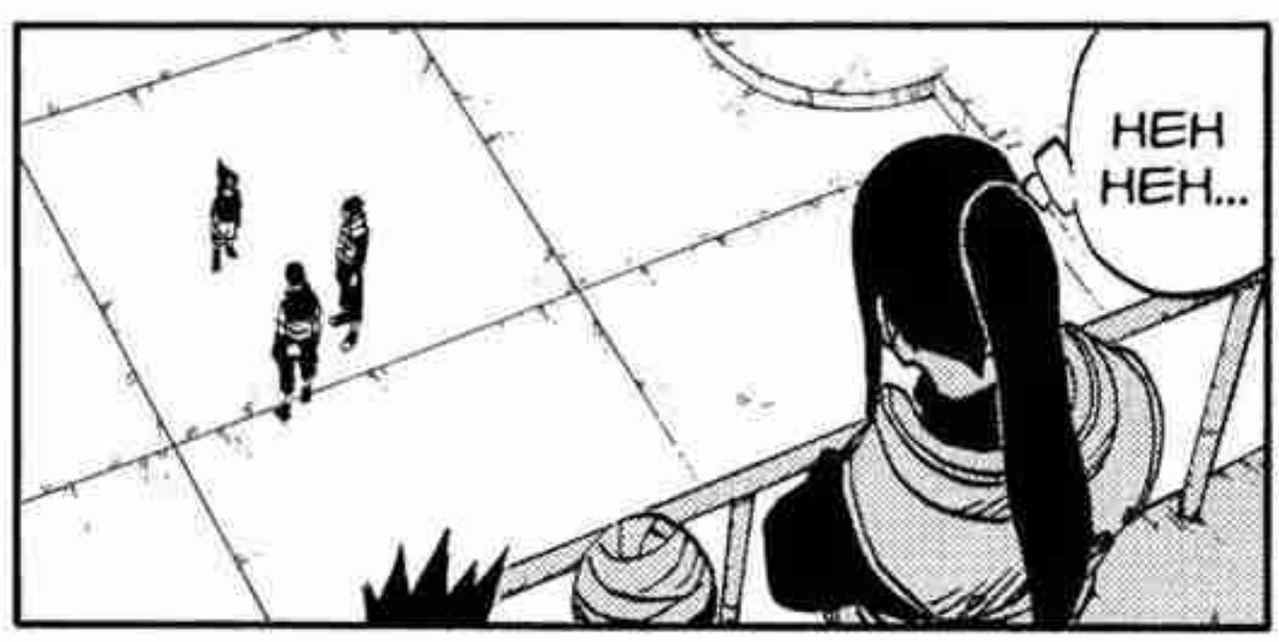
OWW...!
THROB
FLINCH
...THE PAIN'S NOT GETTING ANY BETTER...

UHHHHH... IT'S TIME FOR THE FIRST ROUND TO COMMENCE... ALL RIGHT?

!
DON'T USE THE SHARINGAN.
...!!
...I FIGURED.
...THE CON-SEQUENCES WILL CHANGE YOUR LIFE.
IF THE SPELL-MARK ON YOUR NECK IS ALLOWED TO RUN RAMPANT...
...HOW DID YOU KNOW?
...
!!
...
...SUSPENDED?!
AND I'LL BE FORCED TO STOP YOU. PLEASE DON'T FORGET THAT.
IF THEY SEE ANY SIGN OF THAT, THE MATCH WILL BE SUSPENDED.
TAK
TAK

...


SUKE, 'T USE THE RINGAN AIN!!
IF I USE MY CHAKRA CARELESSLY, THE MARK WILL TAKE OVER MY PSYCHE, CALLING UPON AND EXPENDING ALL OF THE POWER I HAVE...
THE MARK SEEMS TO RESPOND TO MY CHAKRA.


HEH HEH...

SO... FOR THE PURPOSES OF THIS MATCH... NOT ONLY IS THE SHARINGAN VERBOTEN...
...BUT I'LL ALSO HAVE TO BE RESTRAINED IN USING MY CHAKRA EVEN FOR THE NORMAL ARTS!

...ARE THE VERY WORST YOU COULD FACE, SASUKE!
WHAT A PITY THAT YOROI'S TALENTS...

HOW SHOULD I DO THIS?
NOW...

SASUKE... DON'T OVEREXTEND YOURSELF...

FWUP
SHALL I START?

SWIP
GO FOR IT.

PLEASE BEGIN!
ALL RIGHT...

RUSTLE
GLEAM

FWIP

KLA

HYAAA!!

WOBBLE

RATS!!

SKID

THROB

UNH...
RATTLE

TAK
UNH!
WHUD

THOK!!
ZZZZ

STOMP!!
STOMP

!

TH
P

AH!

!!
THAM!
KRAK
YAIK
OW!
!
GRAB
YES!!
HMPH!
YANK
TUG
TUG
!!!
.....
MY STRENGTH... IT'S FADING?!
?!

POW
AAHH!!

SHIVER
SLAP
SHIVER
SHAKE
SHAKE
CRUNCH
?!
SHAKE SHAKE

KO
SWAT
!

TAK

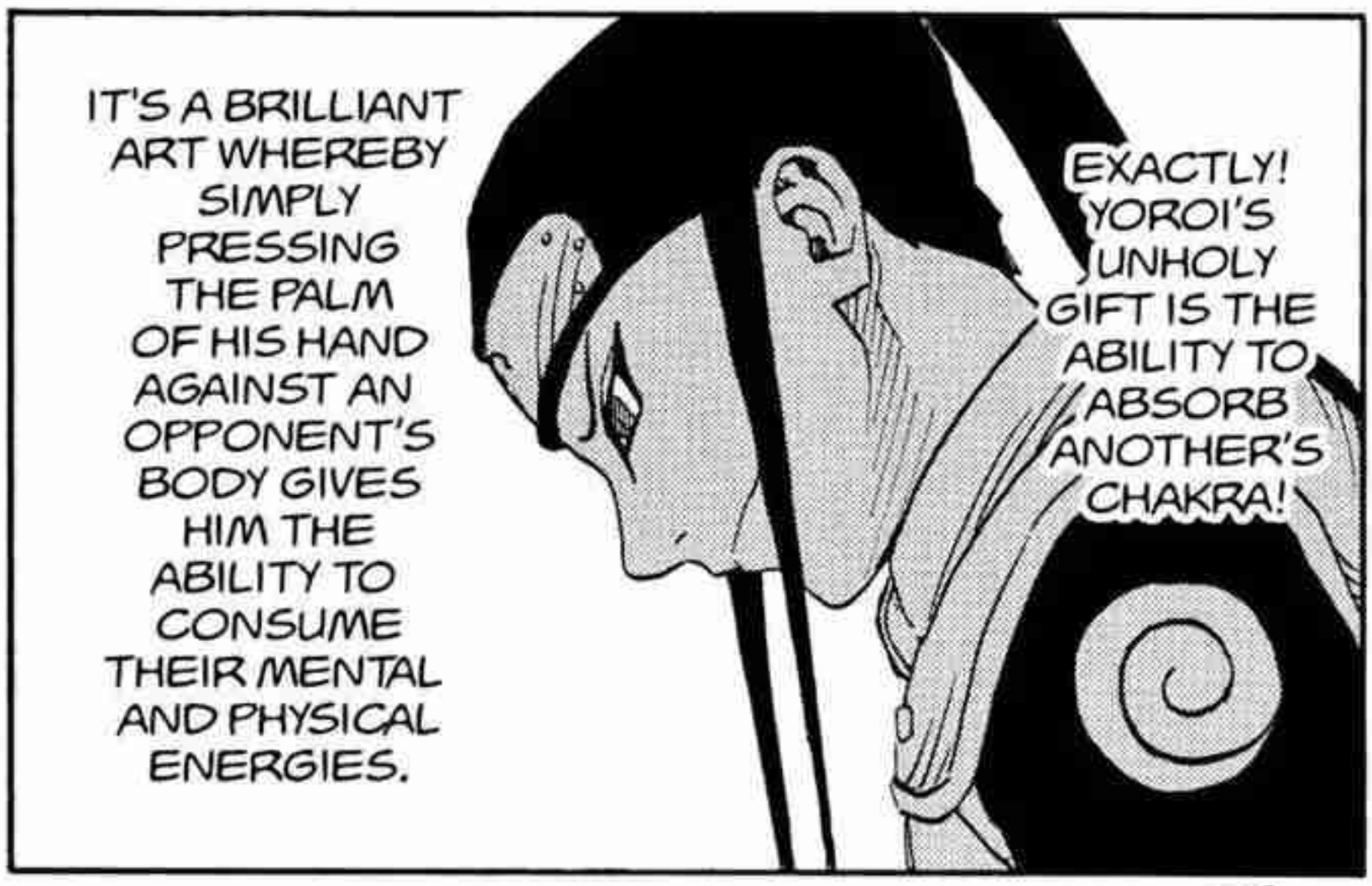
TWITCH
TWITCH
UNNH...
WH-WHY...? WHERE DID ALL MY STRENGTH GO?
TWITCH

!!
SHHF
SASUKE!!
SNATCH
TREMBLE
TREMBLE
SHIVER
SHAKE
HEH HEH...
THAM
!!
FLOP

...YOU'RE... FEEDING ON MY CHAKRA...

SASUKE...!!

!!


IT'S A BRILLIANT ART WHEREBY SIMPLY PRESSING THE PALM OF HIS HAND AGAINST AN OPPONENT'S BODY GIVES HIM THE ABILITY TO CONSUME THEIR MENTAL AND PHYSICAL ENERGIES.
EXACTLY! YOROI'S UNHOLY GIFT IS THE ABILITY TO ABSORB ANOTHER'S CHAKRA!

...HEH HEH... FINALLY FIGURED IT OUT, EH?

...YOU WILL HAVE NO RECOURSE BUT TO CALL UPON THE POWER OF MY CURSE-MARK!
AND ONCE ALL YOUR CHAKRA HAS BEEN DEVOURED, SASUKE...
THAT'S IT... I OPEN YOURSELF UP...
...TO ALL THAT DELICIOUS POWER!!
AAUGH!!

OWW!!
CK
UUF
THOK
...SON OF A...!!

IF YOU TRY TO RESIST THIS PATH, YOU WILL SURELY DIE!
OHH... YOU...

PUF
HUF
HUF
UNH...!!

THIS IS MY LAST CHANCE... BUT HOW DO I...?
IT'S WHAT HE'S AFTER... TO KEEP ME WITHIN HIS REACH...

HUF
THAT WAS... TOO CLOSE...
IF HE MAKES CONTACT WITH ME AGAIN, I WON'T EVEN HAVE ENOUGH ENERGY TO MOVE...
PUF

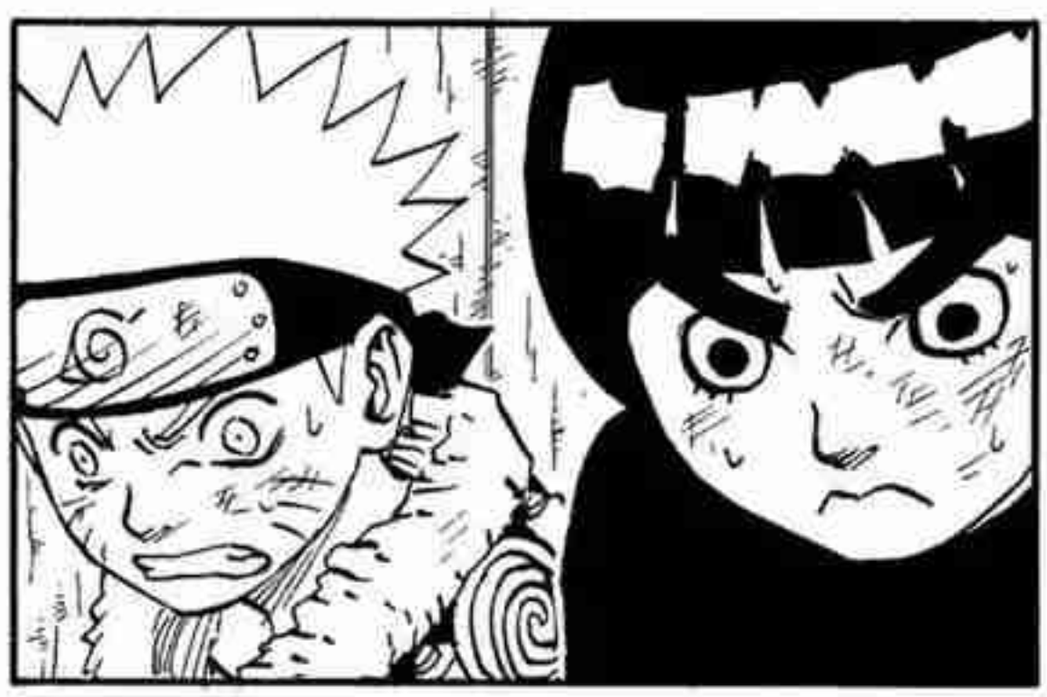
...HAVING ANY STRENGTH LEFT TO OPPOSE ME.
HEH HEH... IMAGINE A LITTLE VERMIN LIKE YOU...
GLEAM

SASUKE...!!

...THIS IS ALL HE CAN DO?
UCHIHA SASUKE...

...

PUF
HUF
!



!
THAT'S...!!

AREN'T YOU EMBARRASSED TO HAVE EVERYONE SEE YOU AS A BIG LOSER?!
HOW CAN YOU STILL CALL YOURSELF UCHIHA SASUKE?! YOU'RE A DISGRACE TO... TO YOURSELF!!

HEH...
TAK

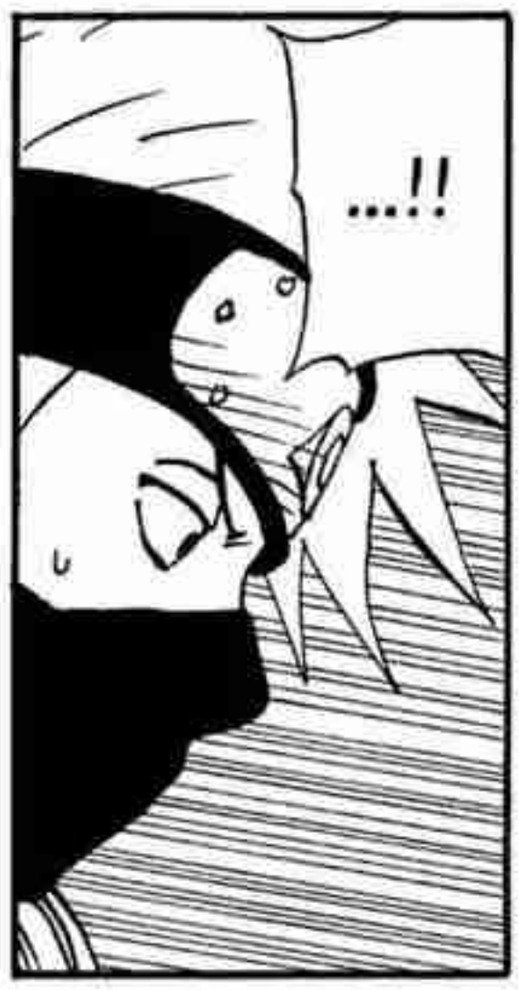
...!!

THAT'S IT!!

THIS IS IT!!
NOW I'LL ABSORB ALL OF HIS CHAKRA!
YOU COULDN'T HAVE PICKED A WORSE TIME TO LET YOUR MIND WANDER!!

!!!

I GUESS THIS IS THE END...


...!!

THAT'S MY...!!
!!

HOP

WHAT...?!

AFTER THIS, I'LL LIMIT MYSELF TO MY OWN SPECIAL SKILLS, BUT FOR NOW...!
!!!

THE WORLD OF KISHIMOTO MASASHI
MY PERSONAL HISTORY, PART 7.1

SO MUCH HAPPENED DURING MY FINAL YEARS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL THAT THERE'S STILL A LOT TO WRITE ABOUT, SO I'LLCONTINUE...

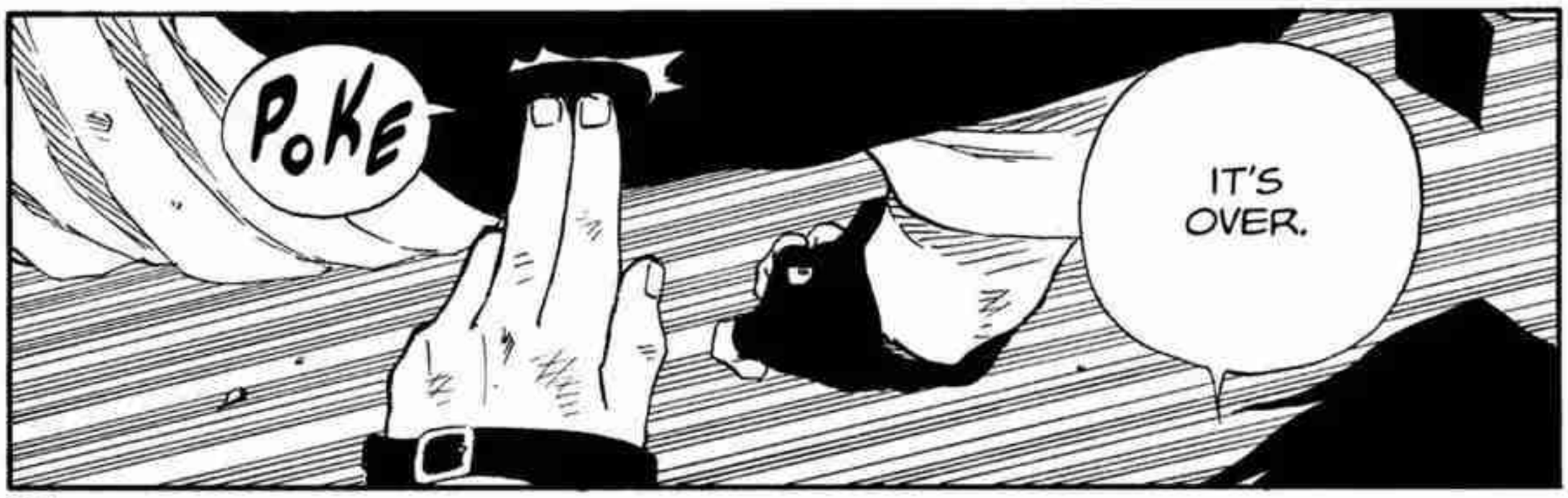
I'D BECOME SO OBSESSED WITH *DRAGON BALL* THAT, BEFORE I HAD EVEN REALIZED IT, MY OWN ART HAD BEGUN TO SO COMPLETELY MIMIC THE STYLE OF TORIYAMA AKIRA'S ARTWORK THAT MY DRAWINGS LOOKED JUST LIKE HIS.

AROUND THAT TIME, LOOKING AT THE VIDEO GAME NEWS IN *SHONEN JUMP'S* GAME GUIDE INSERT, I SAW ILLUSTRATIONS THAT LOOKED JUST LIKE MR. TORIYAMA'S.

"WHATEVER IT IS, THIS GAME LOOKS AWESOME!" I THOUGHT, AND WHEN I PERUSED THE COLUMN MORE CLOSELY AND REALIZED THAT MR. TORIYAMA HAD DESIGNED THE CHARACTERS, I GOT VERY EXCITED. THAT GAME, NEEDLESS TO SAY, WAS *DRAGON QUEST*. I REALLY WANTED TO PLAY IT, BUT BACK THEN THAT WAS AN UNREACHABLE DREAM FOR ME. AT THAT TIME, I DIDN'T EVEN HAVE A FAMICOM ("FAMILY COMPUTER"--THE ORIGINAL NINTENDO GAME SYSTEM) THOUGH MOST OF MY CLASSMATES DID OWN ONE.

BEGGING MY PARENTS WOULDN'T HAVE WORKED, BECAUSE MY FATHER WAS VERY STRICT. IF I SO MUCH AS BREATHED THE WORD "GAME," HE'D LECTURE ME AND TELL ME TO GO STUDY. THAT'S WHEN MY LITTLE TWIN BROTHER HAD AN INCREDIBLE EPIPHANY AND SAID, "OUR ONLY HOPE IS TO HAVE SOMEONE GIVE US A FAMICOM!!" AND HE STARTED NEGOTIATING WITH SOME OF OUR FRIENDS WHO HE THOUGHT WERE LIKELY PROSPECTS. I DOUBTED THAT ANY OF THOSE KIDS WOULD JUST GIVE AWAY SOMETHING THAT COST OVER 10,000 YEN (ABOUT 100 U.S. DOLLARS)... UNTIL... VOILA! ONE OF OUR FRIENDS ACTUALLY PRESENTED US WITH HIS FAMICOM! IN THAT MOMENT, THAT KID'S GENEROSITY MADE HIM SEEM LIKE A GOD TO ME!

Number 68: Blood of The Uchiha



EAT THIS!

OH!

KAGEBUYO -- SHADOW OF THE DANCING LEAF...?!

SMIRK
...

PLEASE...

!!

IT HURTS...
SHUDDER

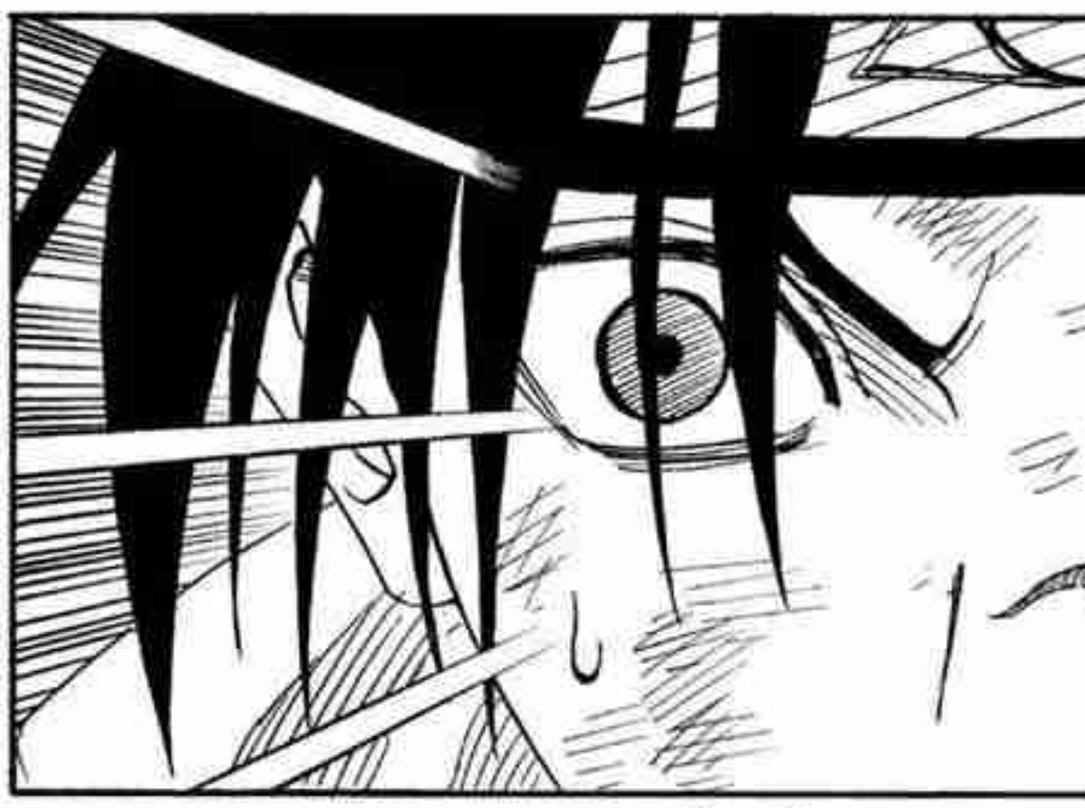
HMPH... THEY WORRY... MAYBE TOO MUCH.

HEY, IDIOT! WHY THE HECK ARE YOU TRYING TO ACT SO COOL?!

...PLEASE WITHDRAW...

HE'S REACHED HIS LIMIT!

...I'M NOT JUST GONNA...
...LIE BACK AND LET IT...


...CONSUME ME!!

FFFMMMM

THE CURSE MARKS ARE... RECEDING!
...!!

!

!!

SHHF
!!

LET'S GO!

THUMP

EH...?

SMAT
POK

!!

SWUP

BRUSH
STUPID AMATEUR!

ZZZN

!

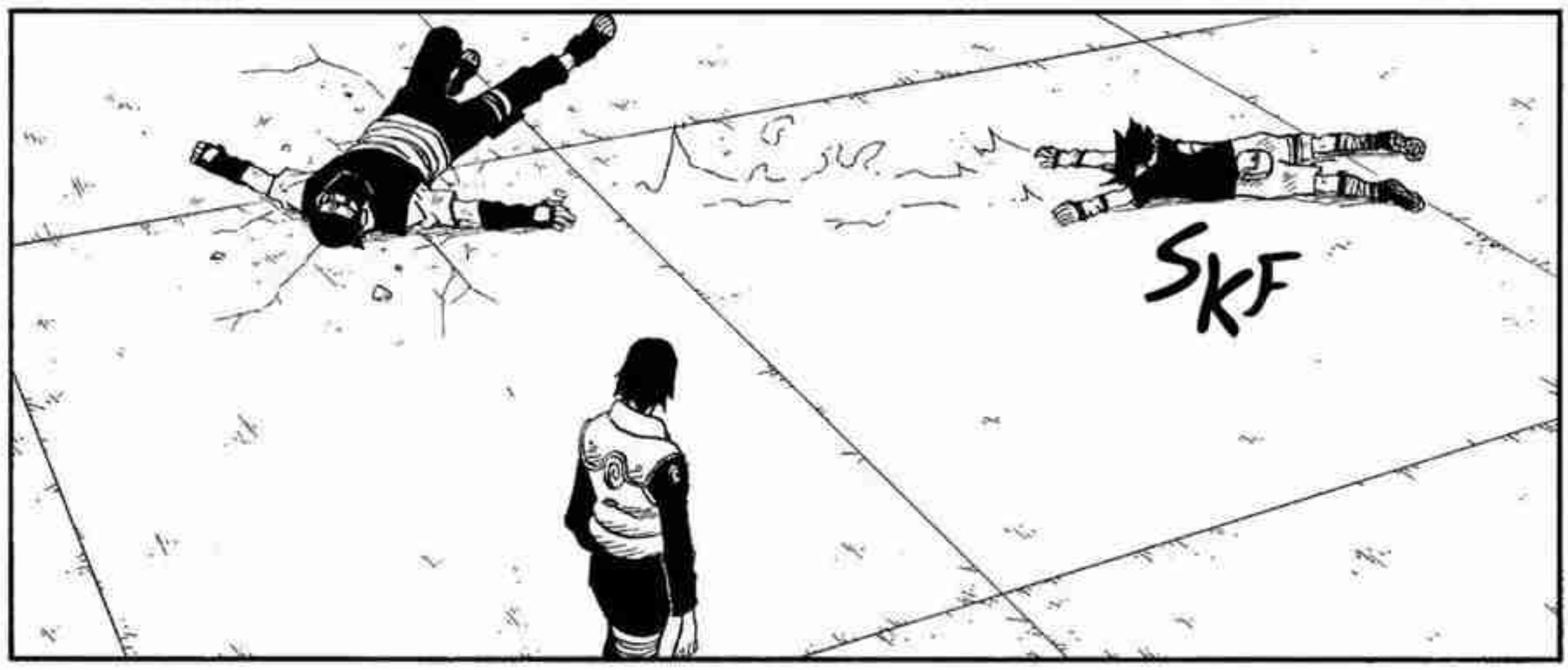
STUPID AMATEUR, INDEED!

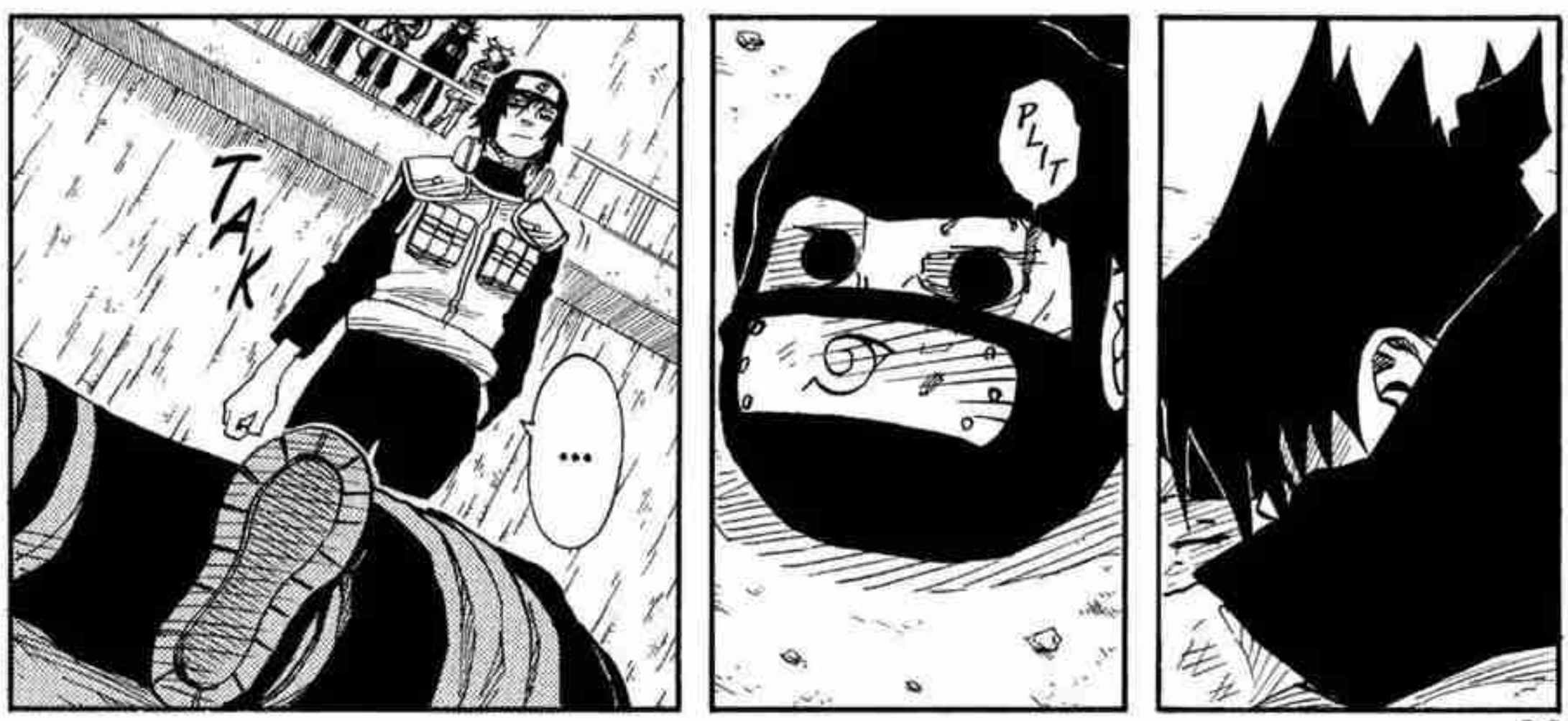
ARGH!!
OWNG
AGH!!
AGH
AND NOW...

ZAM

SHISHIRENDAN! BARRAGE OF LIONS!

!
SKF
SKF
SKF
SKF


SKF


TAK
...
PLIT

READ THIS WAY
!
I CAN TELL WITHOUT EVEN LOOKING...
KOFF
KOFF
SHF
TINGLE
!
HUF
GROAN
HUF
PUF
HUF
PUF
UCHIHA SASUKE IS THE CHAMPION OF THE FIRST BATTLE... AND ADVANCES PAST THE PRELIMINARIES TO THE NEXT LEVEL!
I'M HALTING THIS MATCH BEFORE IT GOES ANY FURTHER. IN OTHER WORDS...
HUF
HUF
HUF

FWUMP

!
HE DID IT!!!

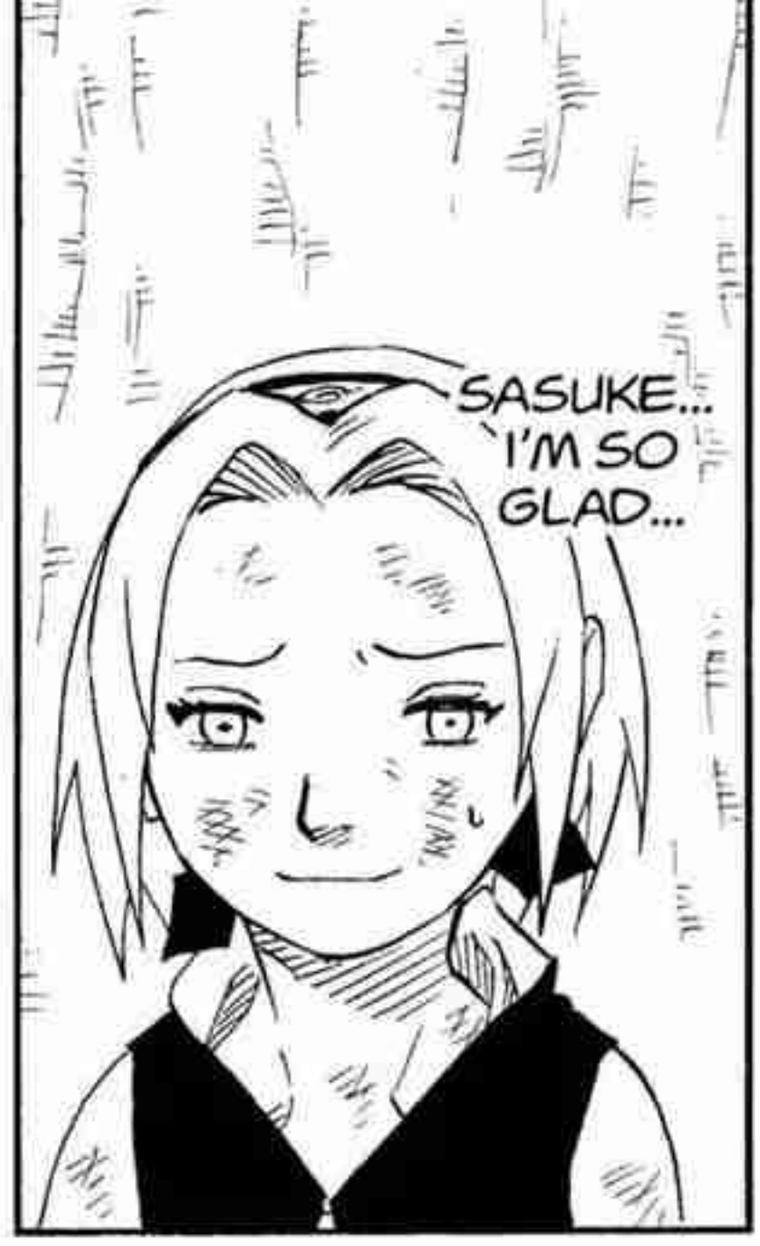
HMPH...
...

...HE MUST HAVE USED HIS SHARINGAN EYE TO MEMORIZE THOSE MOVES WHEN HE SPARRED WITH THAT LEE KID!
MAKE-OUT VIOLENCE
MAKE OUT
IT LOOKED LIKE THE TECHNIQUES HE USED PRIOR TO THE SHISHIRENDAN WERE DERIVED FROM GUY'S FIGHTING STYLE...
R

HEY! WELL DONE!
!
NUDGE

AND YOU CAME OUT LOOKING LIKE YOU'RE THE ONE WHO GOT BEAT UP!
!
HEY, SASUKE!
YOU WON... BUT IN SUCH AN UNCOOL WAY!!

SHUT UP, CLOWN.
HUF
HUF


SASUKE... I'M SO GLAD...

I GOTTA MAKE SURE I DO AT LEAST AS WELL!!
TREMBLE
...

THROB
OWW...
BUT THAT TRICK REALLY WIPED ME OUT... I GUESS IT'S NOT SOMETHING I CAN USE TOO OFTEN.

BAM
IF I HADN'T SEEN YOUR MOVES UP CLOSE WHEN WE WENT HEAD-TO-HEAD, THIS ONE WOULD HAVE TURNED OUT REALLY BADLY.
LEE... I OWE MY LIFE TO WHAT I WAS ABLE TO DRAW FROM YOU.

BAM

I GET IT!

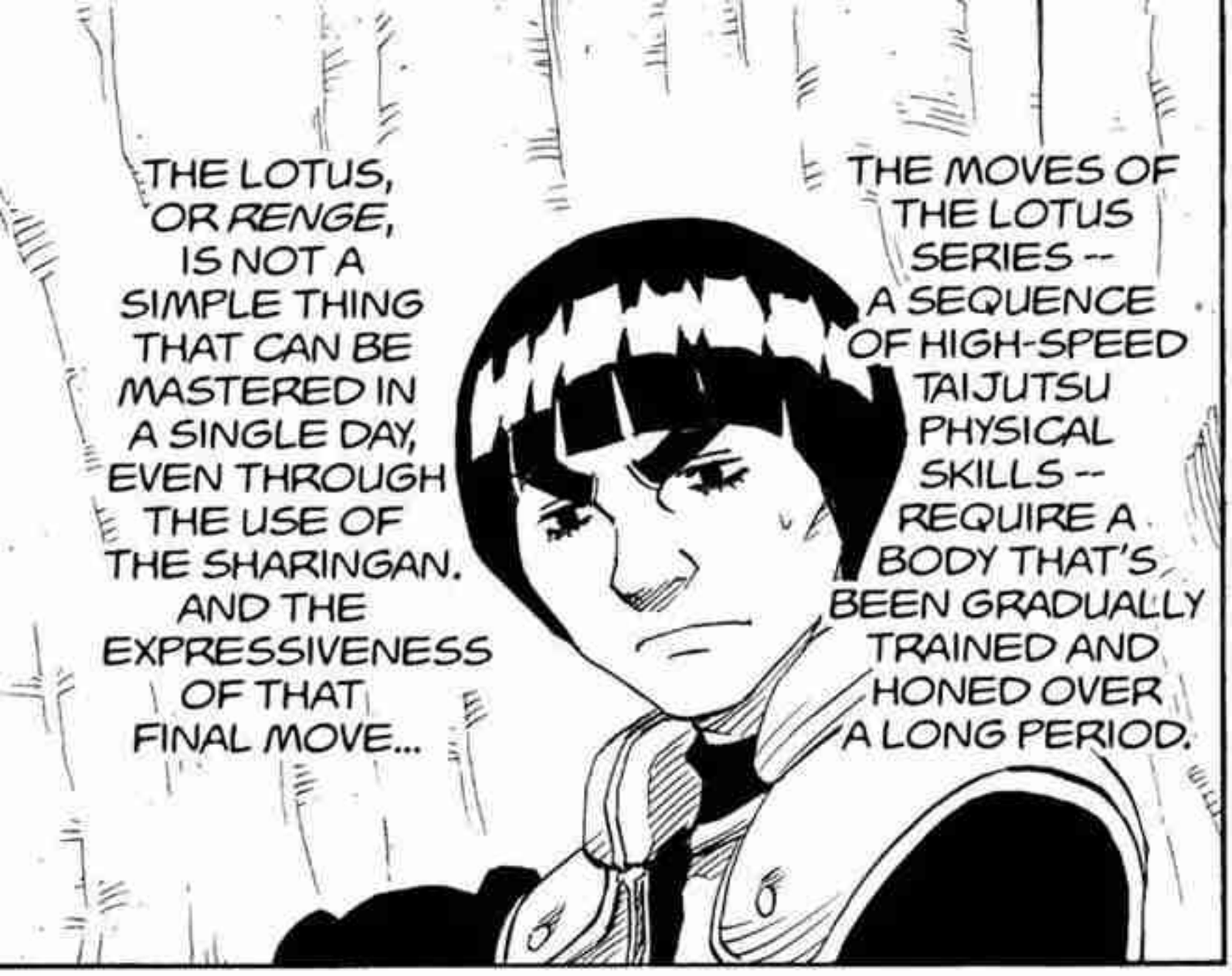
...

QUITE A SECRET WEAPON...
THE SHARINGAN MIRROR-WHEEL EYE!!

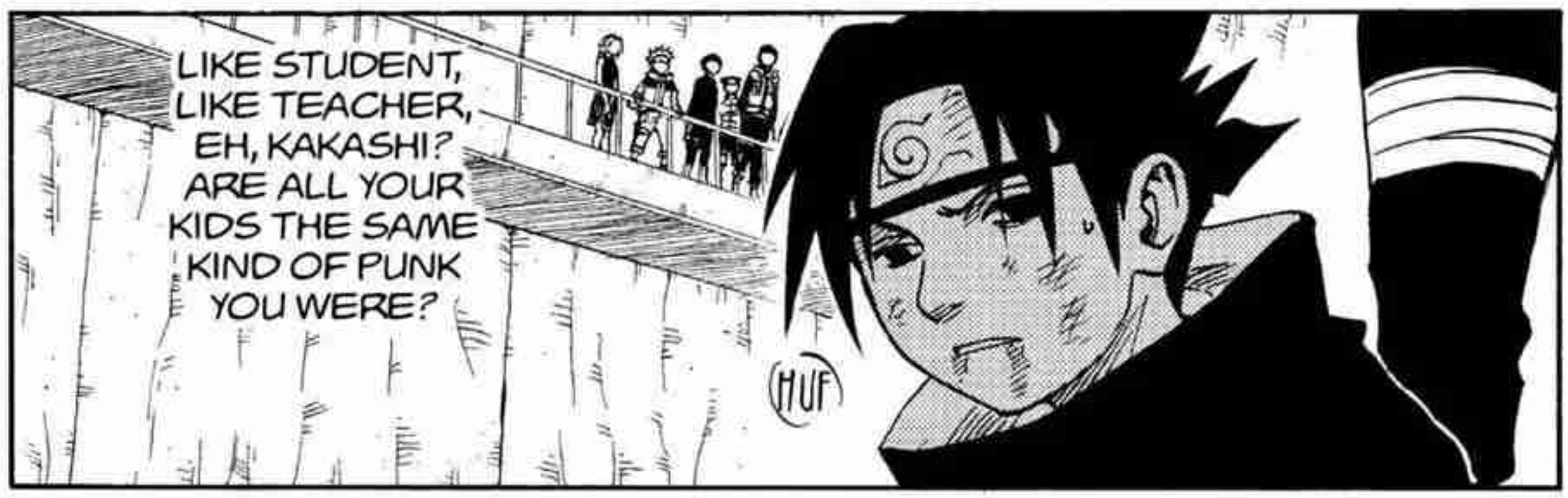
IN JUST ONE ENCOUNTER, HE MANAGED TO ACQUIRE AND MASTER THE MOVE I USED ON HIM!

...A LITTLE ... AFRAID.
I FEEL...

HE'LL ONLY GET STRONGER AS TIME GOES ON...
GASP... OW...
PUF
SASUKE ISN'T SOMEONE TO UNDER-ESTIMATE!
PUF


THE LOTUS, OR RENGE, IS NOT A SIMPLE THING THAT CAN BE MASTERED IN A SINGLE DAY, EVEN THROUGH THE USE OF THE SHARINGAN. AND THE EXPRESSIVENESS OF THAT FINAL MOVE...
THE MOVES OF THE LOTUS SERIES -- A SEQUENCE OF HIGH-SPEED TAIJUTSU PHYSICAL SKILLS -- REQUIRE A BODY THAT'S BEEN GRADUALLY TRAINED AND HONED OVER A LONG PERIOD.

...


LIKE STUDENT, LIKE TEACHER, EH, KAKASHI? ARE ALL YOUR KIDS THE SAME KIND OF PUNK YOU WERE?
HUF

...

...COMING INTO THE FULL FLOWER OF HIS SHARINGAN ABILITY AT SUCH A YOUNG AGE!
HE'S QUITE A BOY...

IF THEY FOUGHT EACH OTHER, WHO WOULD WIN?
THERE'S LAST YEAR'S TOP ROOKIE, HYUGA NEJI... AND IT LOOKS LIKE THIS YEAR'S WILL BE UCHIHA SASUKE...

"BEWARE THE FEARSOME POWER OF THE BLOOD OF THE UCHIHA"!

HUF

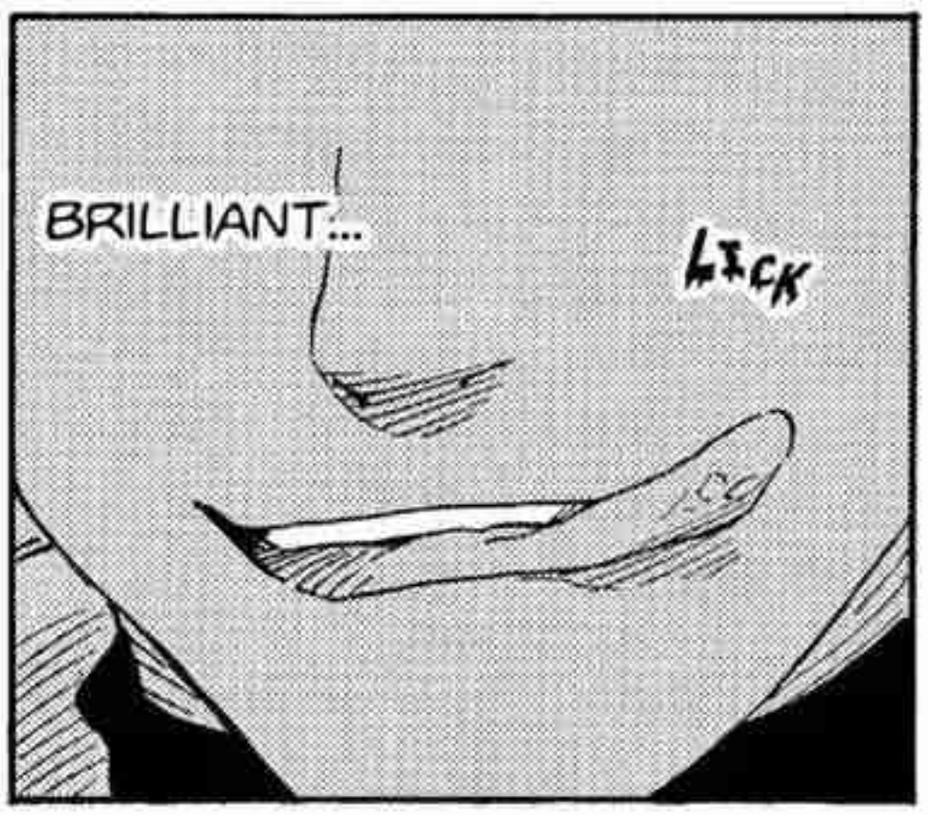
HUF

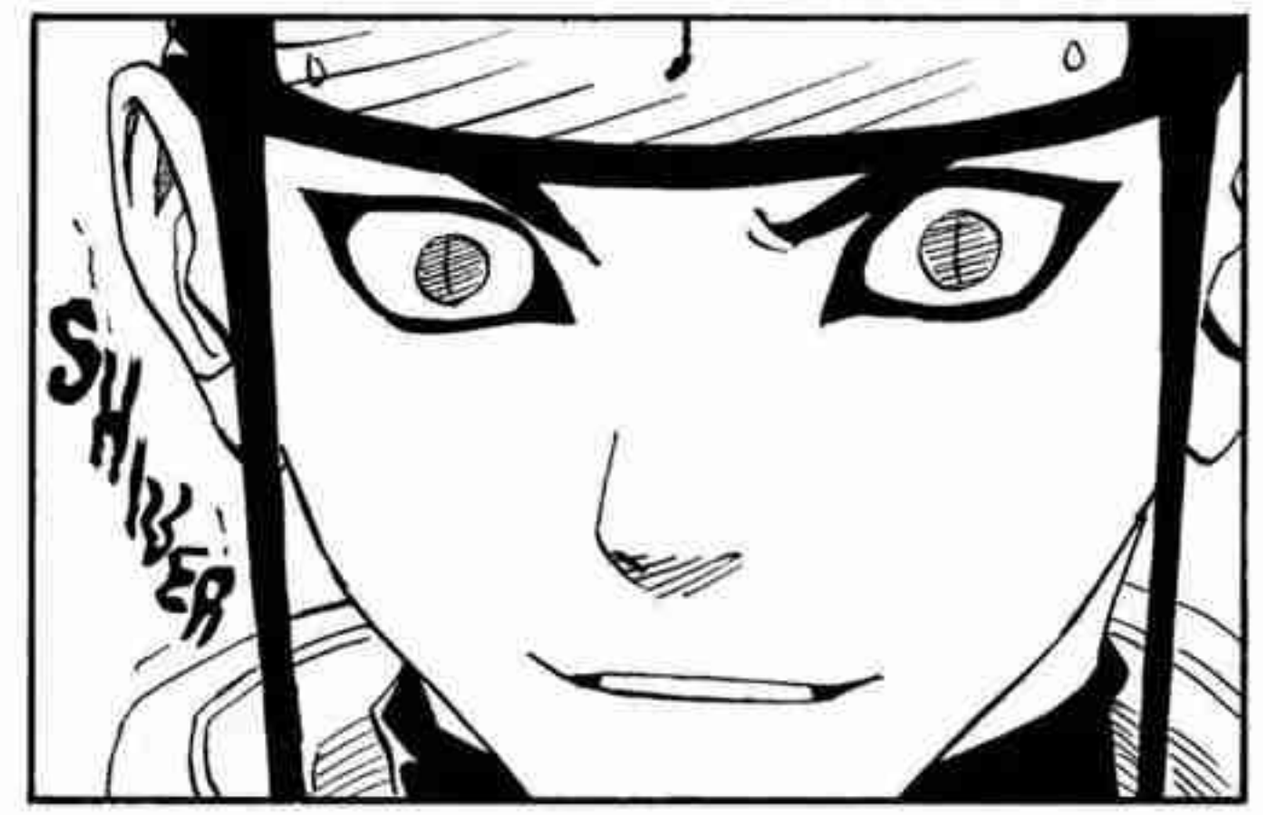
HUF

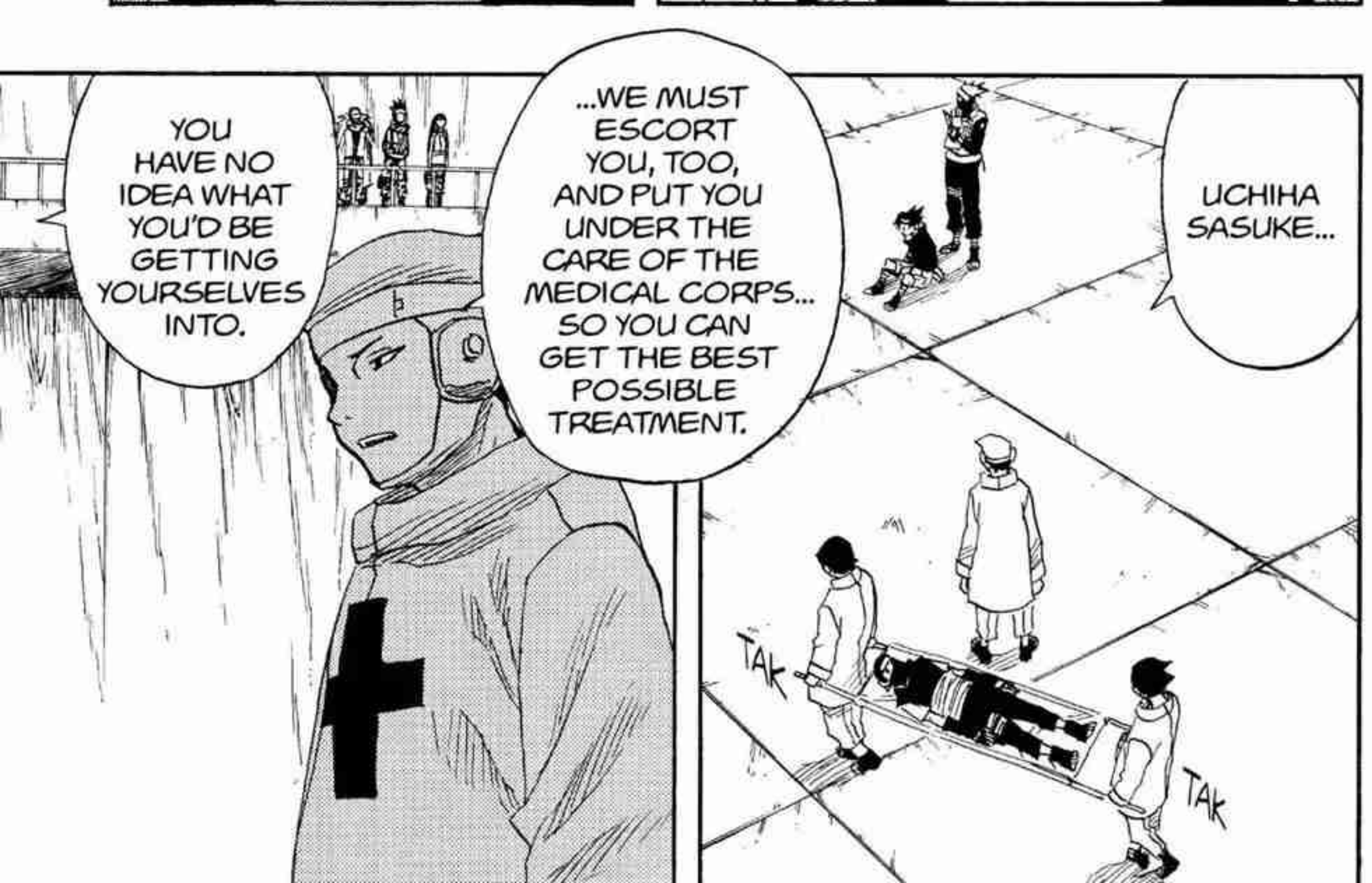
NO WONDER PEOPLE SAY...

COME ON!
IT WASN'T THAT GREAT!
W-WOW...

I'M STARVING! MY STOMACH COULD NOT BE MORE EMPTY!
OOOOOH! SASUKE! YOU'RE THE BEST!
...THAT'S IT. WE'RE DONE FOR!


BRILLIANT...
LICK

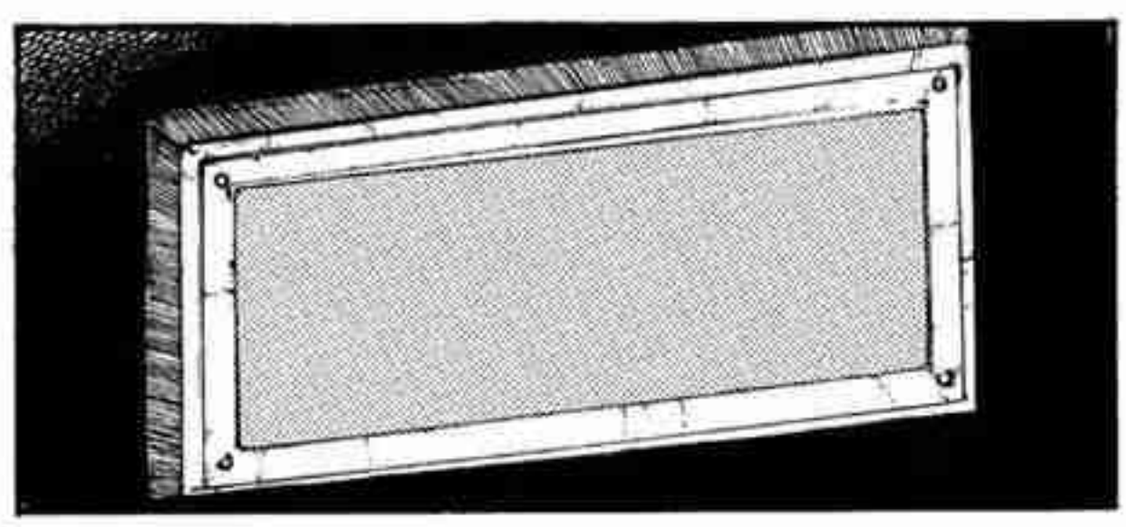

SHIVER


YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU'D BE GETTING YOURSELVES INTO.
...WE MUST ESCORT YOU, TOO, AND PUT YOU UNDER THE CARE OF THE MEDICAL CORPS... SO YOU CAN GET THE BEST POSSIBLE TREATMENT.
UCHIHA SASUKE...
TAK
TAK

!
HE CAN COME WITH ME RIGHT NOW, AND...
SHF

I'LL HANDLE HIM.
!

...
TAP
...I'LL SEAL AWAY THE CURSE MARK.



I WANT TO WATCH EVERYONE ELSE COMPETE.
CAN'T THIS WAIT?

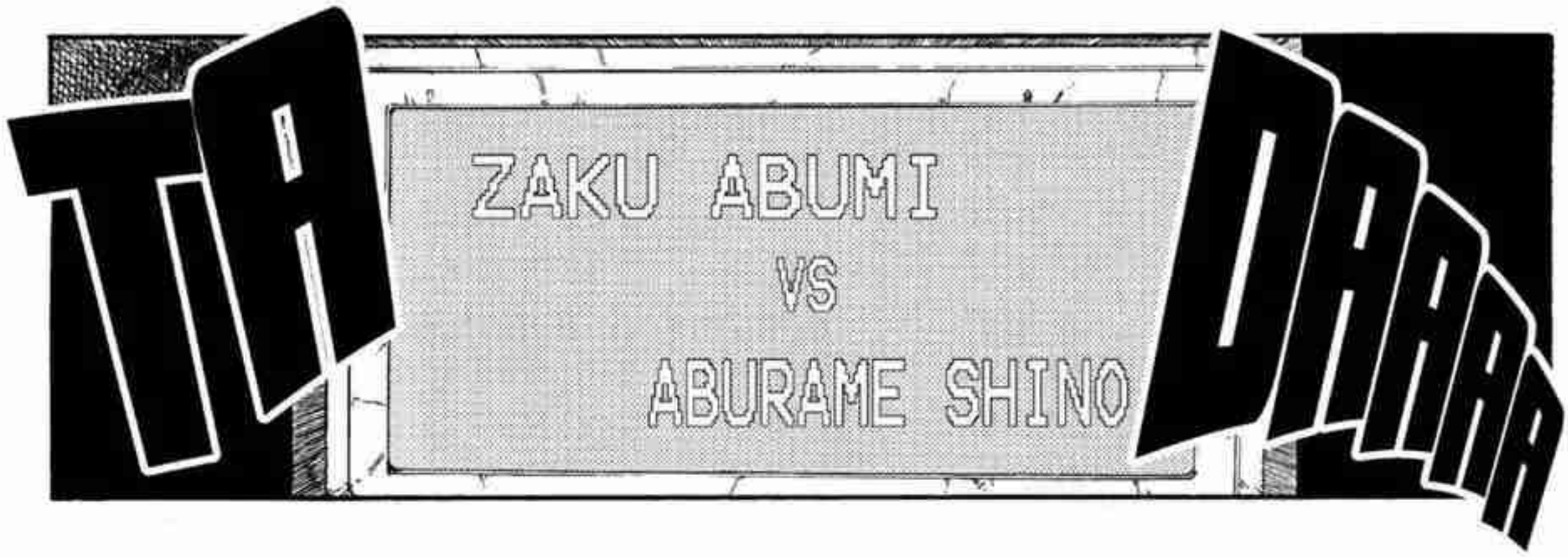
WELL THEN... RIGHT! LET'S GET THE NEXT MATCH GOING.

THIS THING IS SPREADING LIKE A DISEASE, AND IT'S ALREADY CLOSE TO THE POINT OF NO RETURN.

I LET YOU HAVE YOUR OWN WAY ONCE, AND IT'S ONLY MADE YOU GREEDY.

DON'T LET YOUR EMOTIONS CLOUD YOUR JUDGMENT!

NO!



THE WORLD OF KISHIMOTO MASASHI
MY PERSONAL HISTORY, PART 7.2

WE HARASSED MY FATHER RELENTLESSLY UNTIL HE CAVED AND FINALLY LET US BUY *DRAGON QUEST*. IN FACT, IT WAS THE FIRST SOFTWARE I EVER PURCHASED. EVERYTHING ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE WAS NEW AND DIFFERENT. IT WAS THE FIRST ROLE-PLAYING GAME INTRODUCED FOR THE NINTENDO FAMICOM ("FAMILY COMPUTER") GAMING SYSTEM... AND I WAS COMPLETELY AT SEA ABOUT A LOT OF HOW IT WORKED, EVEN AFTER STUDYING THE MANUAL. THERE I'D BE, LOCKED IN BATTLE WITH SLIME, AND UP WOULD POP A MESSAGE CONGRATULATING ME ON HAVING MASTERED THE HOIMI HEALING SPELL NEEDED TO COMBAT IT. BUT I DIDN'T HAVE A CLUE WHAT TO DO WITH IT. ACCORDING TO THE MANUAL, YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO CHANT THE HOIMI AND ALL OF YOUR "HIT POINTS" WOULD BE RESTORED, BUT THERE WAS NO HINT OF HOW TO DO THAT. LUCKILY, SOMEHOW MY LITTLE BROTHER HAD SOME KIND OF FLASH OF INSIGHT AND FIGURED OUT THAT WE SHOULD FLIP THE SWITCH ON THE BUILT-IN MICROPHONE IN THE SECOND CONTROLLER. AS SOON AS HE HAD IT TURNED ON, MY BROTHER YELLED "HOIMI!!" RIGHT INTO THE SECONDARY CONTROLLER'S MIKE!!

SASUKE...

!

(TAK)

(TAK)

Number 69: The Deadly Visitor!!

...

...DID YOU SEE THAT WEIRD BRUISE ON SASUKE? IT WAS GROWING LIKE A FUNGUS!

HEY, SAKURA... DURING THE FIGHT...

!

...IF HE KNOWS, HE'LL WASTE ENERGY WORRYING ABOUT ME.

SAKURA, IT'S FOR THE GOOD OF THE TEAM...

PROMISE YOU WON'T MENTION THIS MARK TO NARUTO.

PROMISE ME...

HUNH?

(HUF)

(HUF)

HMM...

I'M... NOT REALLY SURE.

...FOR THE SECOND MATCH OF THE PRELIMS TO BEGIN!

UHHH... ALL RIGHT, EVERYONE. IT'S TIME...

Number 69: The Deadly Visitor!!

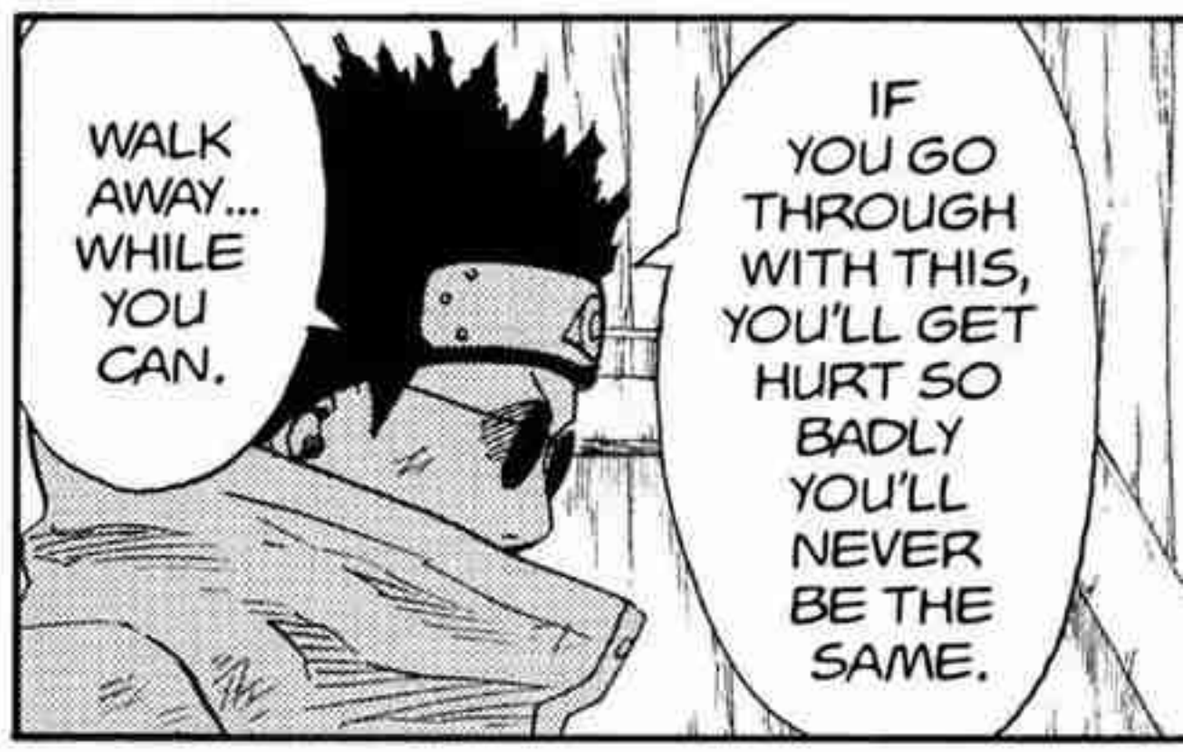
HOW CAN HE HOPE TO FIGHT?
...THE ONE WHO FOUGHT SASUKE AND ENDED UP WITH TWO BROKEN ARMS.
IT'S THAT SOUND NINJA...
...
OUT OF ALL THE PEOPLE HERE, HE'S THE ONLY ONE I WOULDN'T WANT TO GO UP AGAINST ...
HE'S PRETTY TOUGH.
I HOPE SHINO'S UP TO THIS...
OKAY... YOU MAY BEGIN.

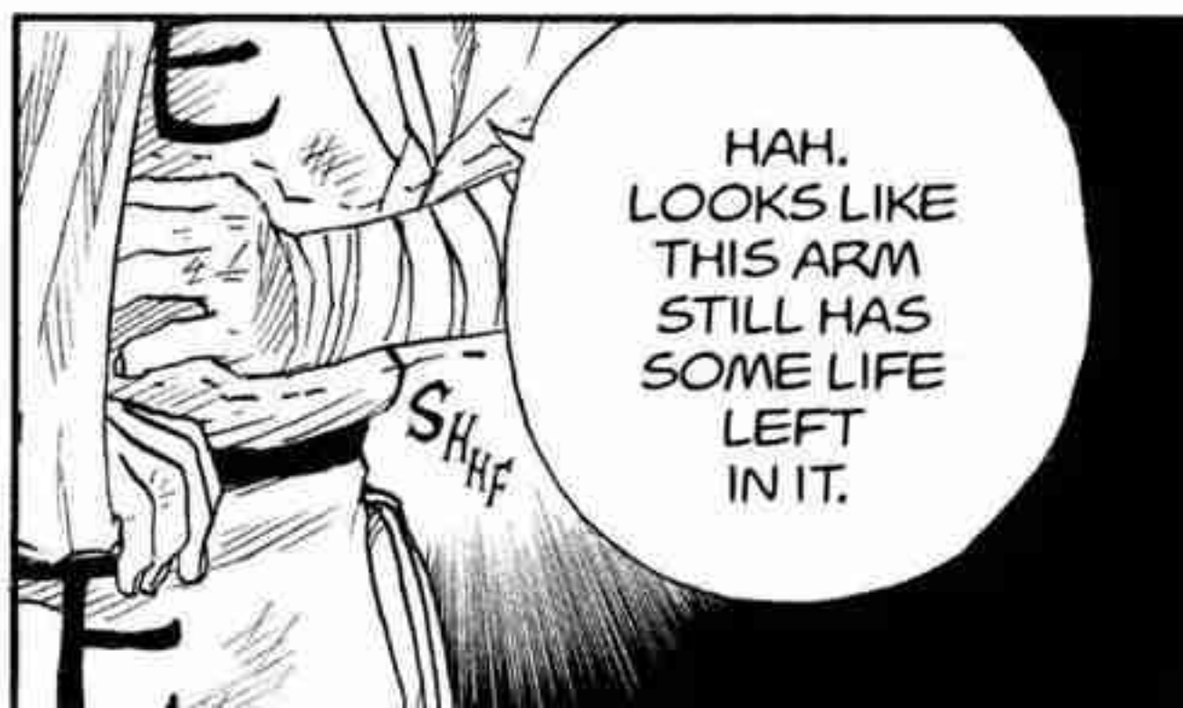
...

HOP

SO... ZAKU...
HOW DO YOU EXPECT TO FIGHT HIM? I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE...

AND I'M BETTING I CAN TAKE YOU WITH ONE HAND TIED... SO TO SPEAK.
CRUNCH
CRUNCH


WALK AWAY... WHILE YOU CAN.
IF YOU GO THROUGH WITH THIS, YOU'LL GET HURT SO BADLY YOU'LL NEVER BE THE SAME.


HAH. LOOKS LIKE THIS ARM STILL HAS SOME LIFE LEFT IN IT.
SHHF

TA TAK

IT'LL TAKE MORE THAN ONE ARM TO BEAT ME!

GRR--!

RRRN

!!

FWUUT

SEE HOW YOU LIKE... THIS!!

JUST SHUT UP!!

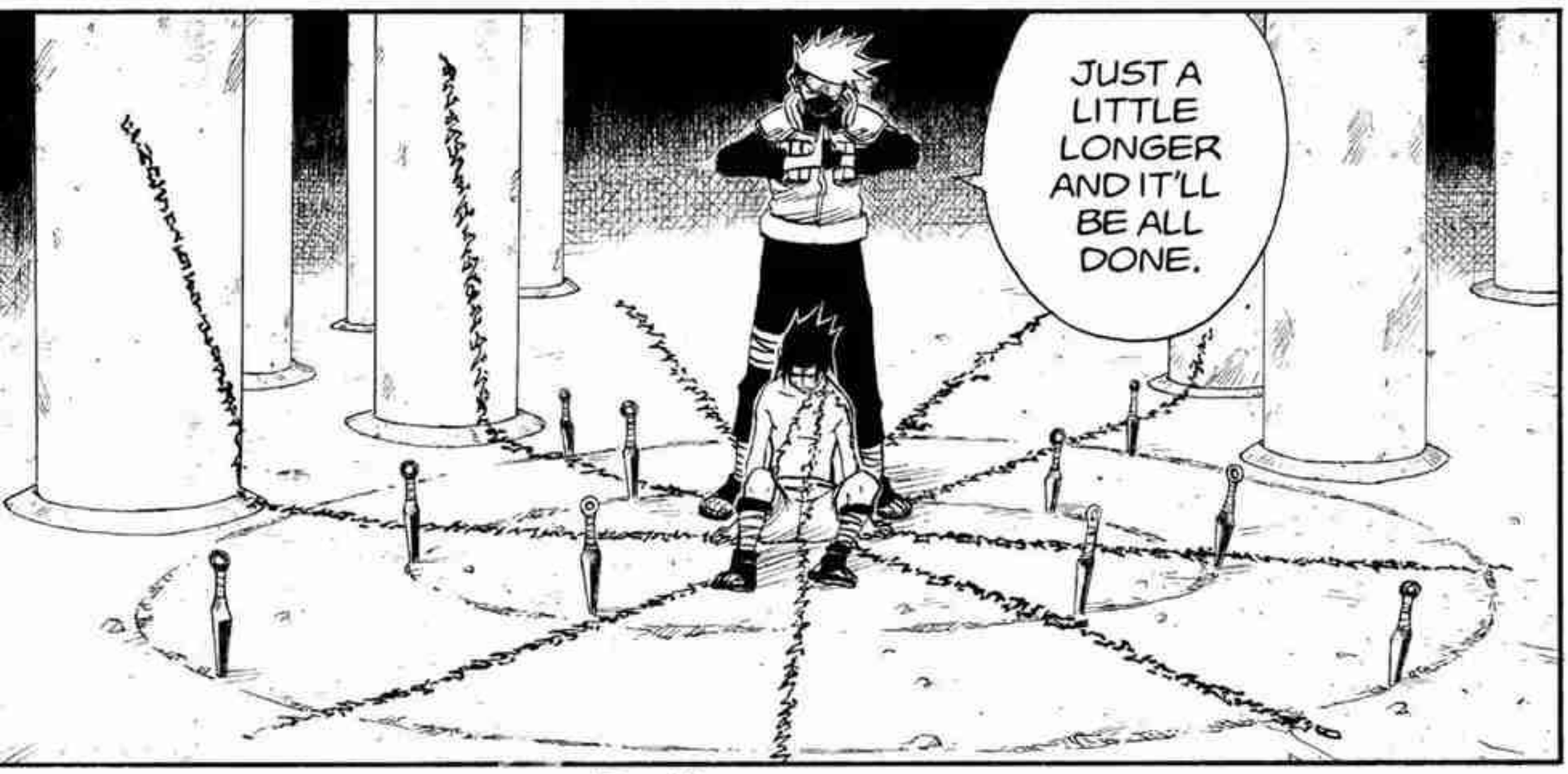
FWW

ZANKUHA! THE BLAST THAT SLICES THE AIR!!

SKIIID

SWUP

THAT'S IT!!
SWIPE.
PLIT


JUST A LITTLE LONGER AND IT'LL BE ALL DONE.

FUJAHÔIN! THE SEALING OF THE CURSE!
ONG

FWUP
FWUP

THROB

AAA—!
HSS

OWW!
HSSSSS

AGH!
GSSS

SSS
SS

HMM...
HUF
FWUMP
HUF
HUF

FUP
OHH...

YOU HAVE TO WANT IT TO WORK... AND YOU MUST BELIEVE IN YOUR OWN POWER TO CONTROL IT. IF YOU DON'T...
...THE CURSE COULD HAVE ITS WAY AGAIN!
SASUKE... THE FOUNDATION OF THE SPELL'S POWER IS IN THE STRENGTH OF YOUR OWN WILL.
HUF
HUF

BUT...
EVEN IF THE CURSE MARK AWAKENS AGAIN...
...THE POWER OF THIS FUJAHÔIN SPELL SHOULD CONTAIN IT.

YOU'RE SO WORN OUT, I BARELY RECOGNIZE YOU.
FLOP

WOBBLE

...YOU'RE...

...LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE ALL GROWN UP.
SKF

SO... YOU'VE MASTERED THE SPELLS OF SEALING, KAKASHI?
FLICK

OROCHIMARU...
...

I'M HERE ABOUT THE BOY BEHIND YOU.
...PARDON MY RUDENESS, KAKASHI, BUT... I HAVE NO USE FOR YOU.

WHAT DO YOU WANT WITH SASUKE...?

IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME...
TAK

KNOW WHAT IT IS YET?
YOU HAVEN'T HAD IT FOR VERY LONG YOURSELF, YOU KNOW.

?!

...AND A THIRD ONE'S JUST GOT TO GET IT, TOO!
OH, YOU KNOW HOW IT IS... TWO GUYS HAVE SOMETHING...

...IT'S...

...THE SHARINGAN!!

!

...UCHIHA BLOOD!

I MUST POSSESS...

BLINK

...!!

...

...THE NEWLY CREATED VILLAGE OF HIDING IN SOUND -- OTOGAKURE...

...THAT IS MY HOME, YOU SEE...

WHAT FOR...?!

IS IT BECOMING CLEAR?

SO IT'S JUST YOUR GREED... AND DELUSIONS OF GRANDEUR.

I SUPPOSE YOU COULD SAY THAT...

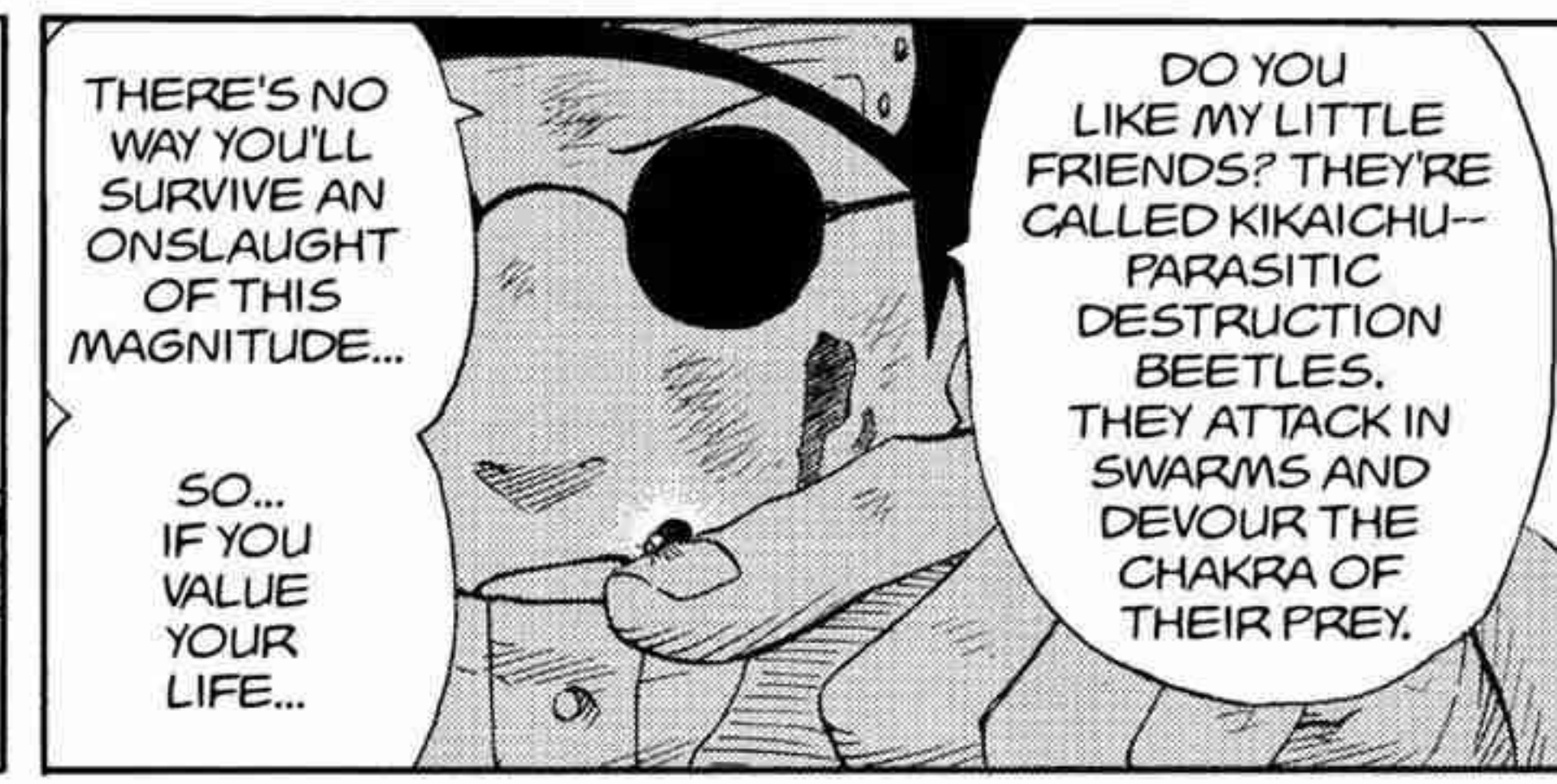
...WH-WHAT THE...?!
SKRIT SKRIT
SKRITCH SKUTTLE
CRAWL SKREECH
CREEP
SKRITCH
SHIVER SHIVER
TWITCH
THEY'RE SWARMING OUT THROUGH HIS SKIN... FROM INSIDE HIS BODY!
B-BUGS?!

!!

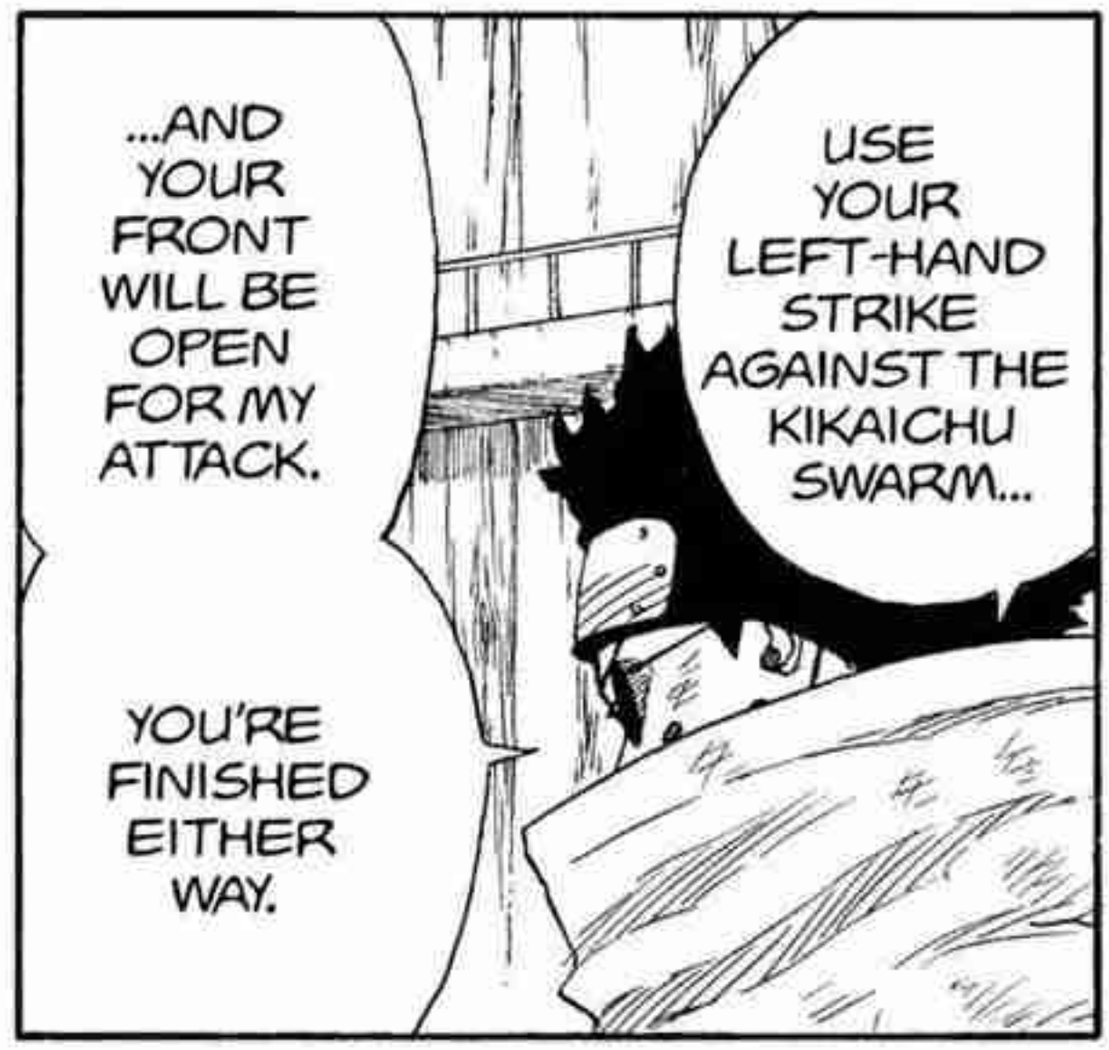
SCURRY

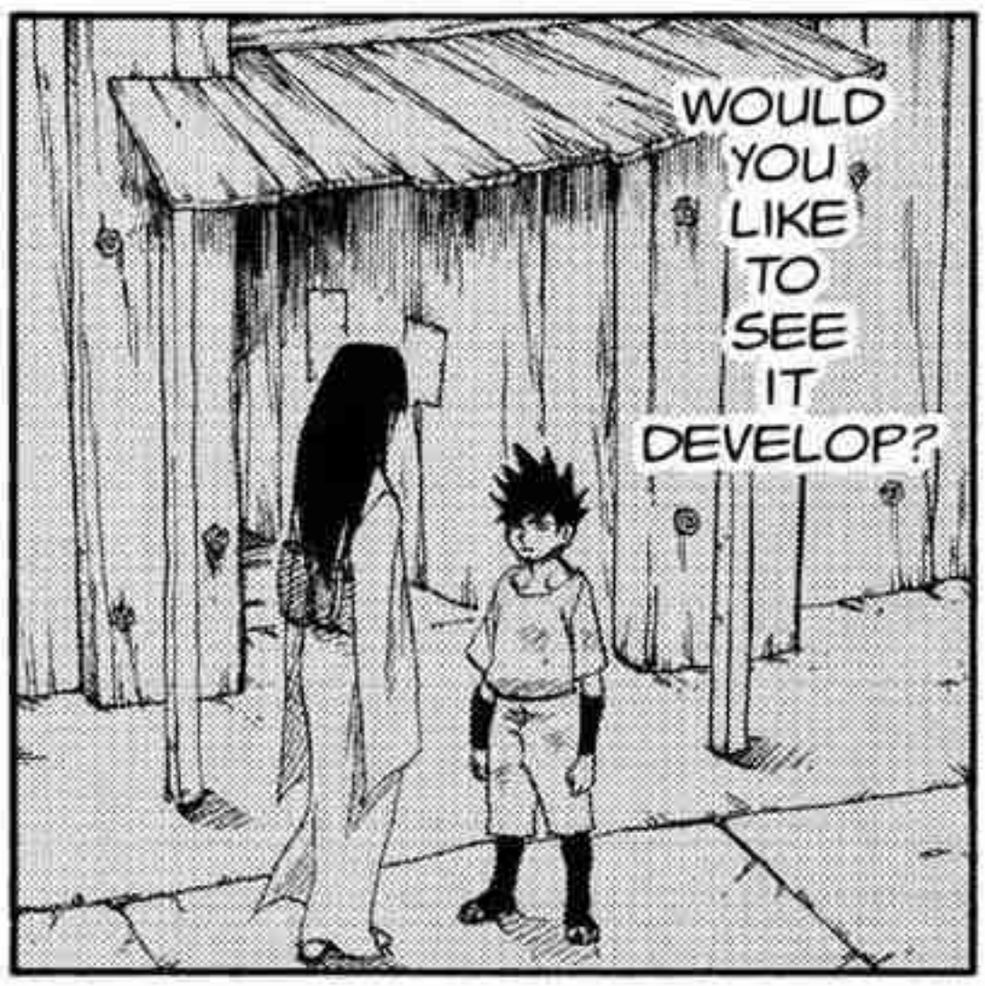
SCURRY

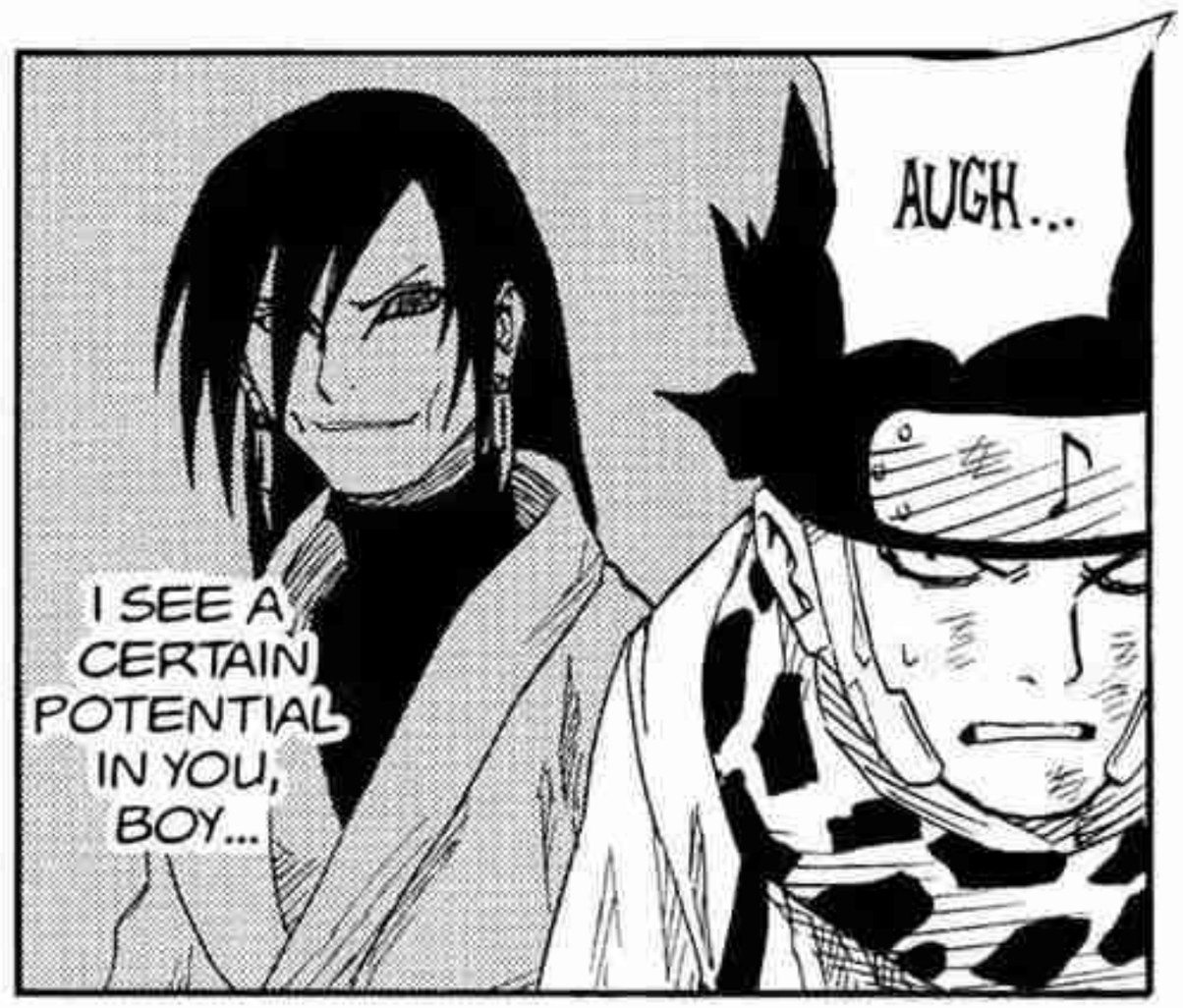
SCURRY



UNLESS, OF COURSE, YOU HAD THE FORESIGHT TO PREPARE A BACKUP PLAN.


...AND YOUR FRONT WILL BE OPEN FOR MY ATTACK.
YOU'RE FINISHED EITHER WAY.
USE YOUR LEFT-HAND STRIKE AGAINST THE KIKAICHU SWARM...


WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE IT DEVELOP?


AUGH...
I SEE A CERTAIN POTENTIAL IN YOU, BOY...

DON'T LET ME DOWN!

I WON'T...

...AND WE'LL DEVELOP IT TOGETHER!
JOIN ME. FIGHT FOR ME...

SNORT
HEH...

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU'RE TALKING TO?!!
...I WON'T BE DISGRACED ANY FURTHER!

HOW ABOUT THIS?!
YOU WANNA SEE A BACKUP PLAN?!

GOOD ONE, ZAKU.
SMOOTH... THE FIRST PART OF THE BATTLE WAS ALL A SCAM TO MAKE IT LOOK LIKE HIS RIGHT ARM WAS STILL PARALYZED...

WHAT?! HE CAN USE HIS RIGHT ARM!

...!!

...IS ONE OF YOUR PAWNS?
SO, YOU THINK THAT SASUKE...
TAKE THIS!!
...A REAL KEEPER...
OH, HE'S A VERY SPECIAL PAWN...

HUNH?

!!

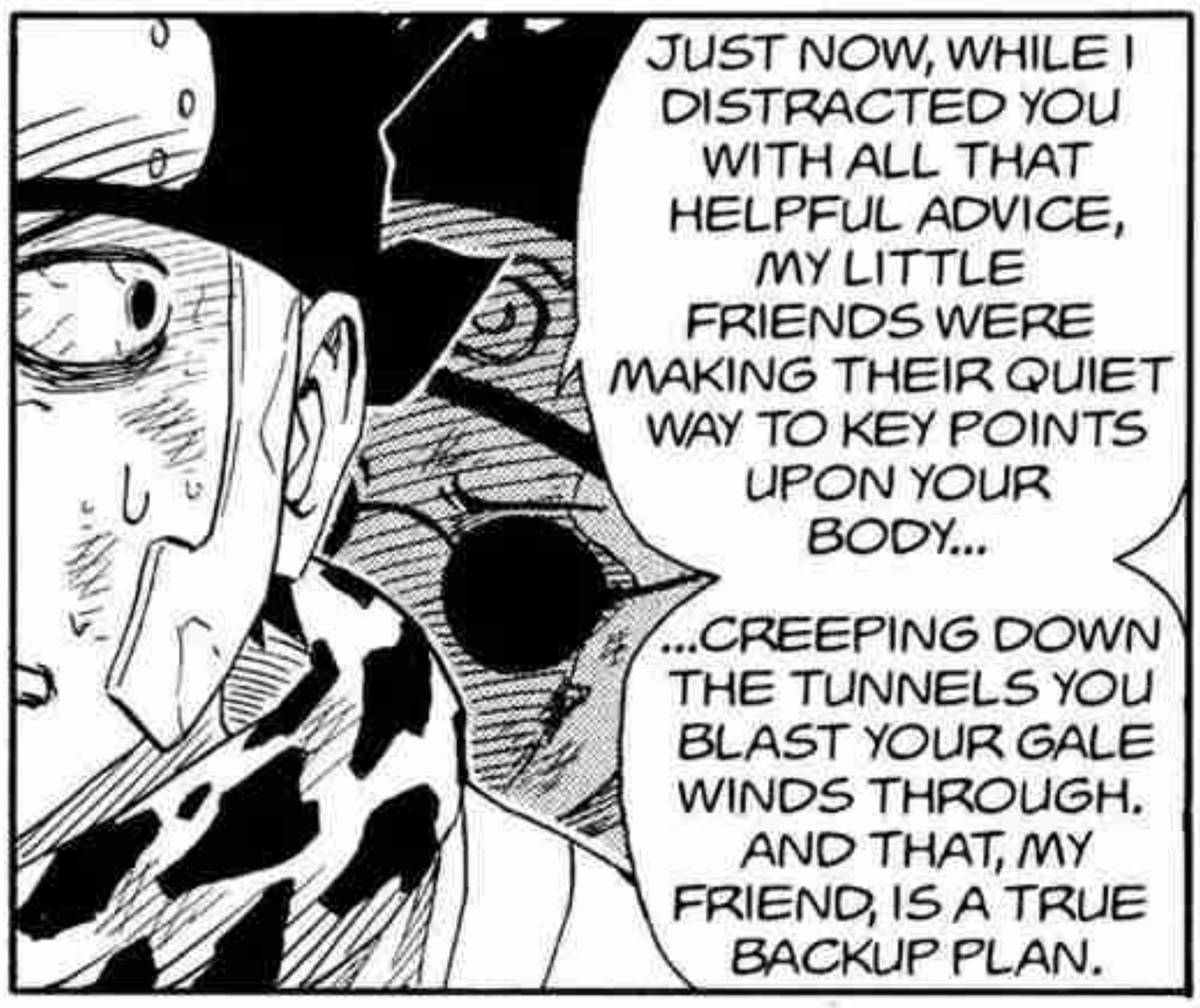
!!

SHLUCK

?!

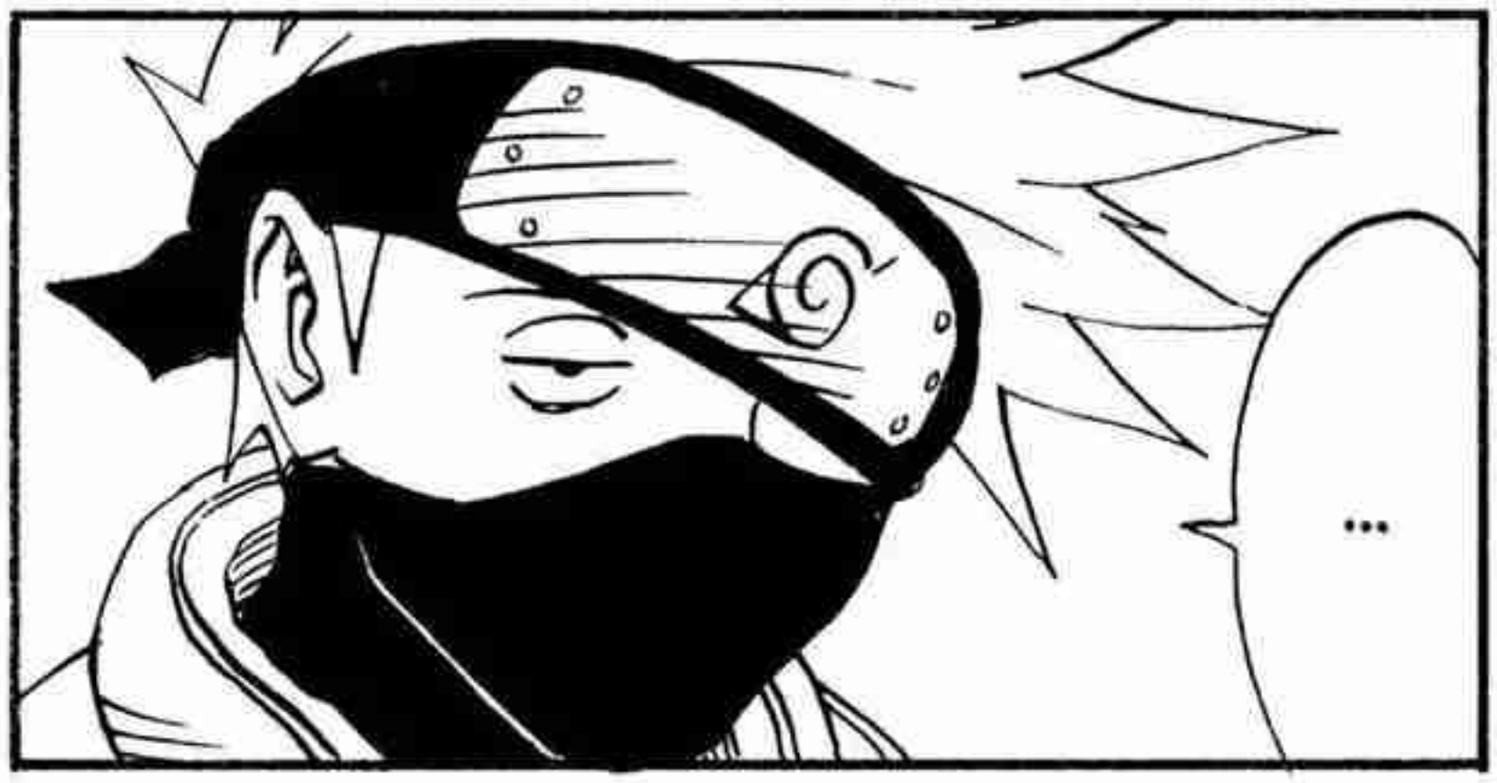
WHAT ON EARTH...?!

!


JUST NOW, WHILE I DISTRACTED YOU WITH ALL THAT HELPFUL ADVICE, MY LITTLE FRIENDS WERE MAKING THEIR QUIET WAY TO KEY POINTS UPON YOUR BODY...
...CREEPING DOWN THE TUNNELS YOU BLAST YOUR GALE WINDS THROUGH. AND THAT, MY FRIEND, IS A TRUE BACKUP PLAN.

...UNLIKE THE BOYS WHO ARE GOING THROUGH THE RIGORS OF THE EXAM PROCESS RIGHT NOW.
...

DOW
Y-YOU...!
...ARE DISPOSABLE.
THOSE BOYS...



Number 70: The One Who Dies!!

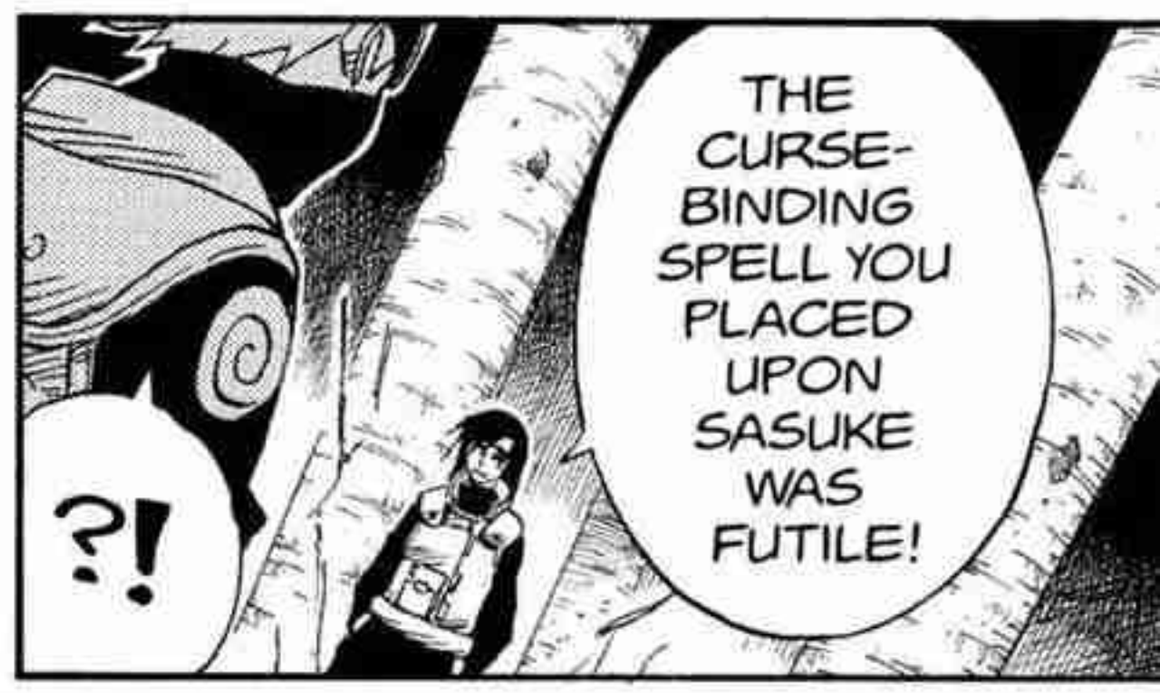
STAY AWAY FROM SASUKE.

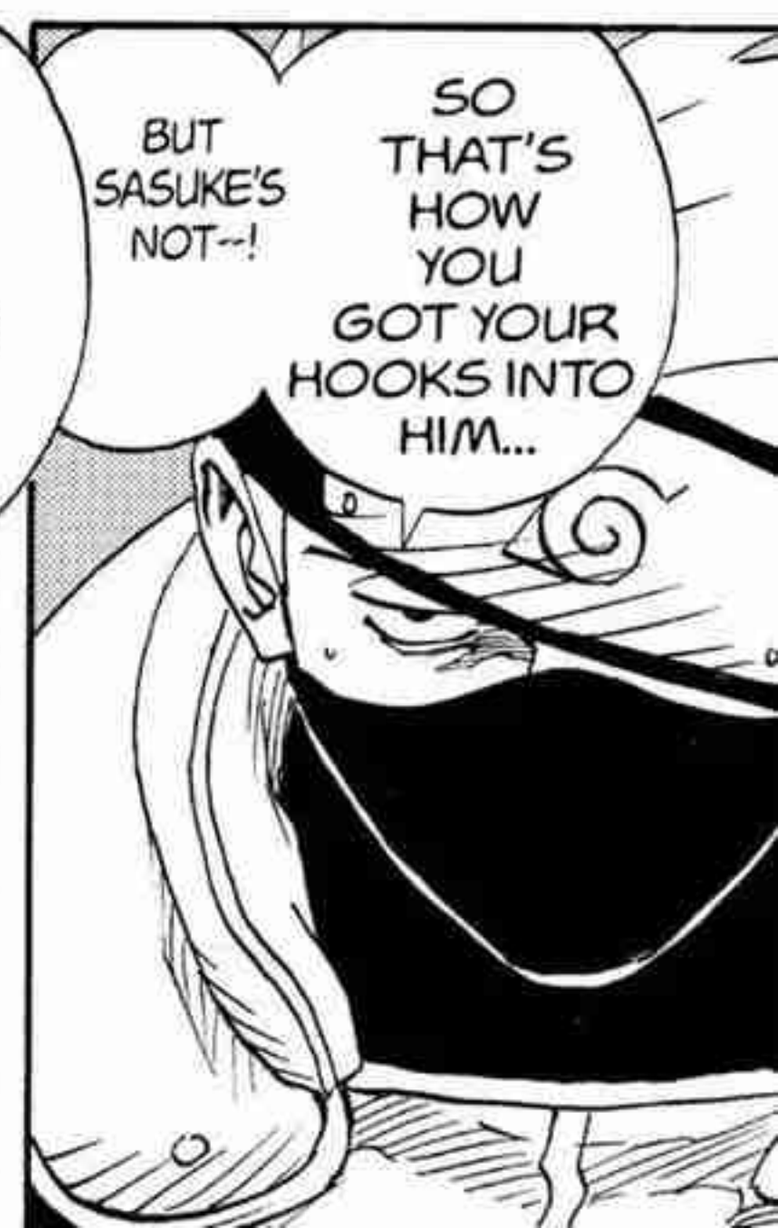
TAK

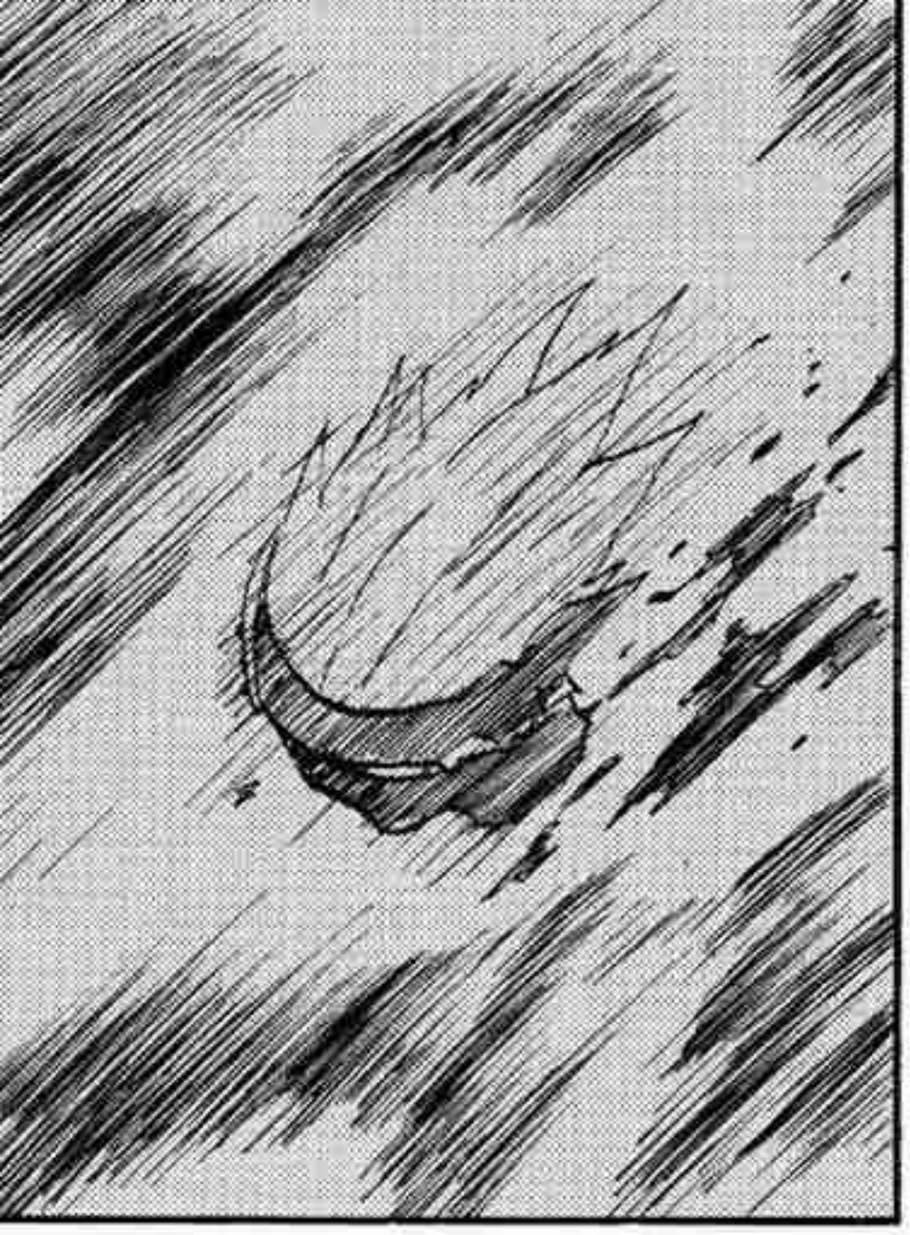
SKF

YOU SAY ONE THING...

...AND DO ANOTHER.



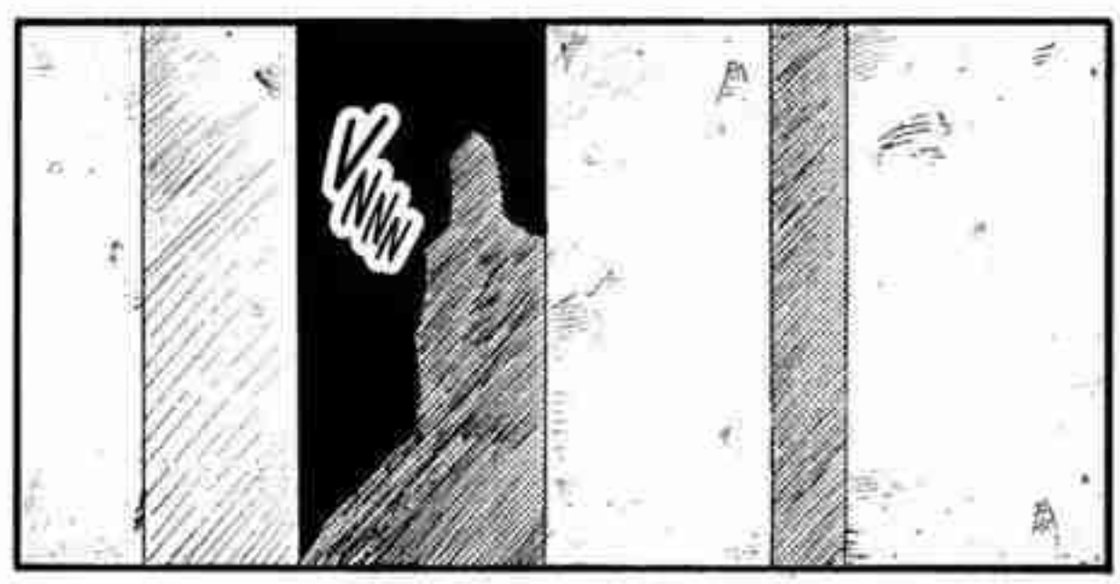




OR ARE YOU ALL TALK?

Number 70: The One Who Dies!!

HUF
WHAT KIND OF FOOL AM I?!
HUF
DID I MIS-CALCULATE?!
HUF

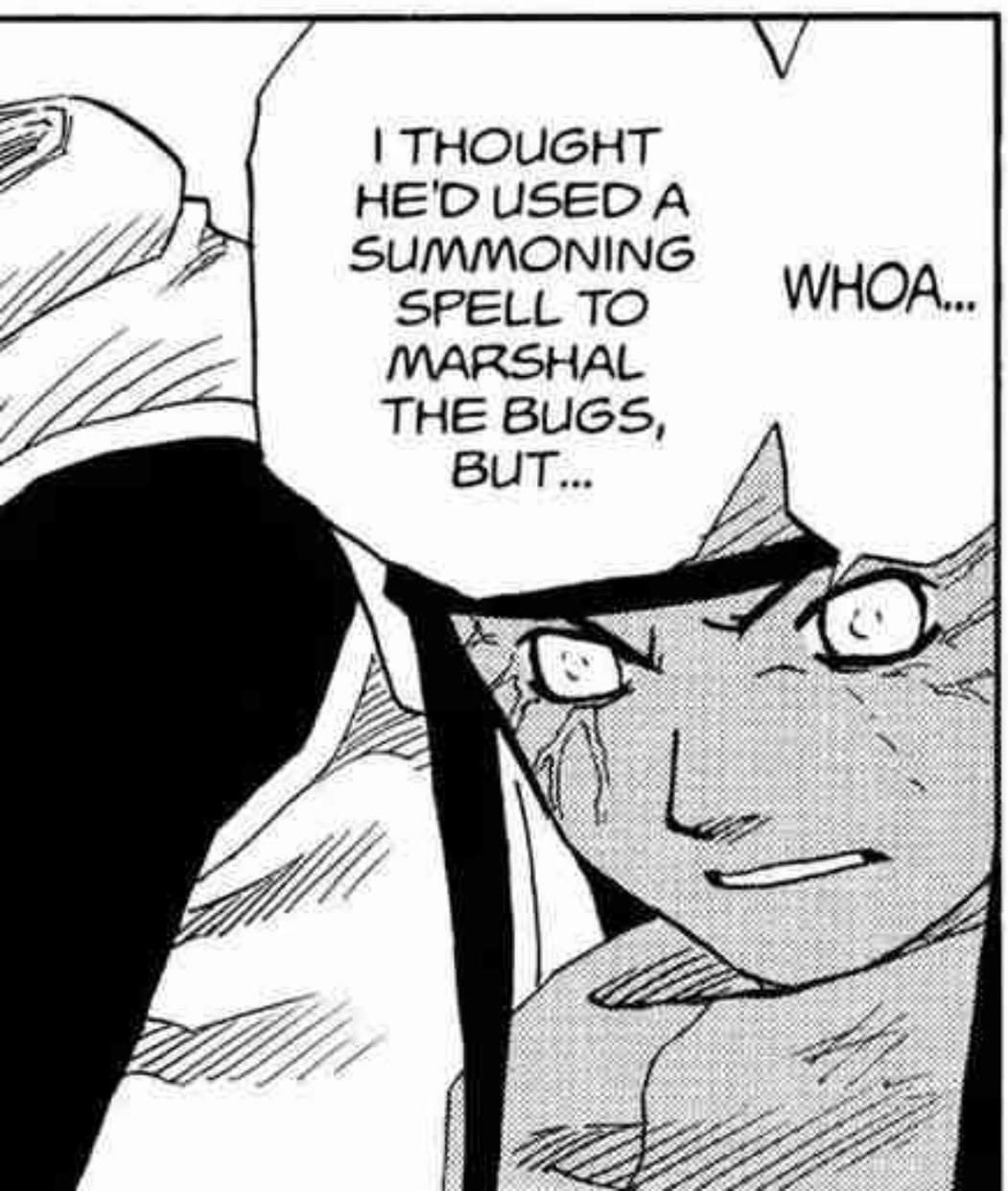

VNNN

-;KOFF;-

FWUP
FWP

...
WH-WHAT THE...? HOW DID... NEJI...?!
SHF

BYAKUGAN! THE ALL-SEEING EVIL EYE!


I THOUGHT HE'D USED A SUMMONING SPELL TO MARSHAL THE BUGS, BUT...
WHOA...

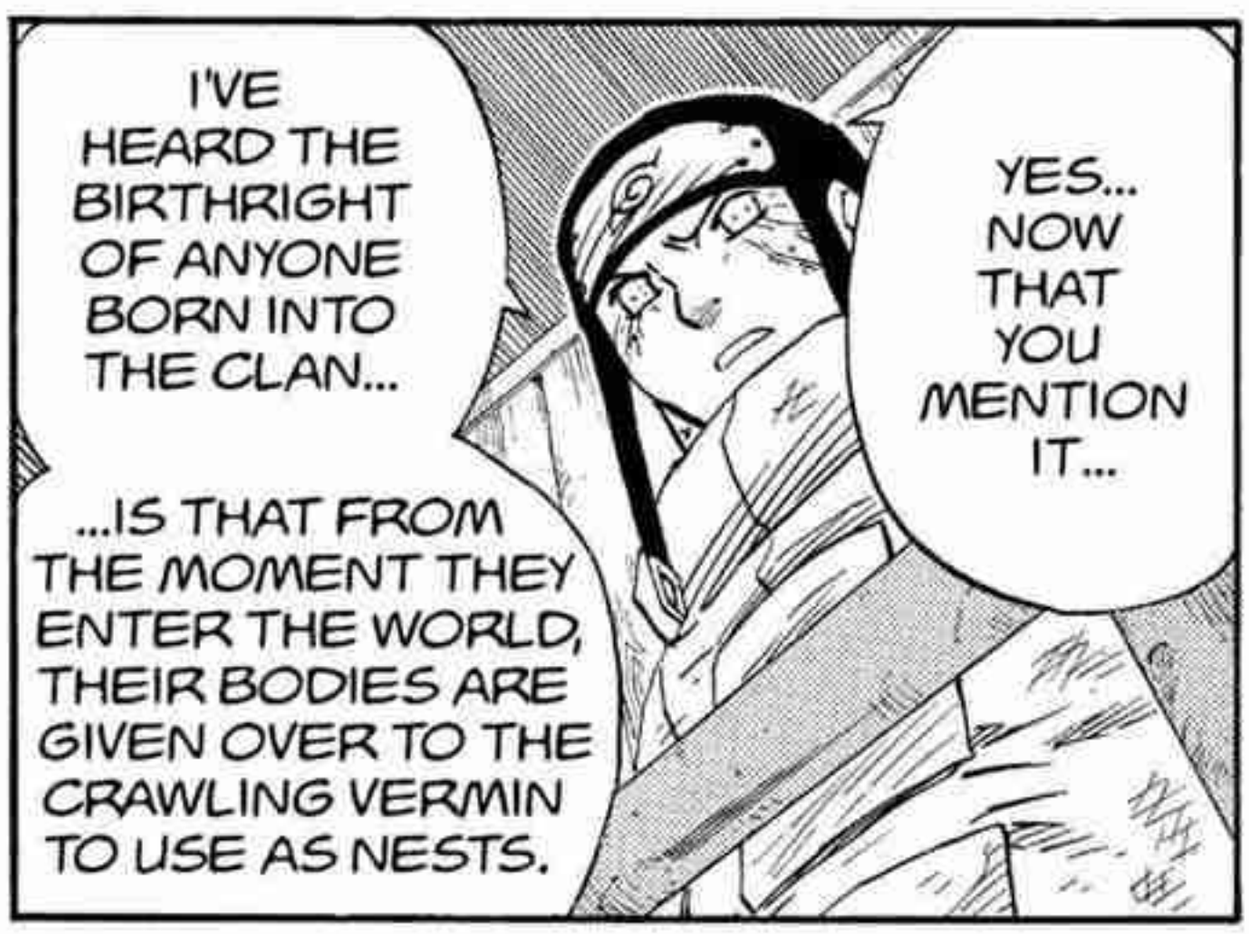
!!

VVIIIIN

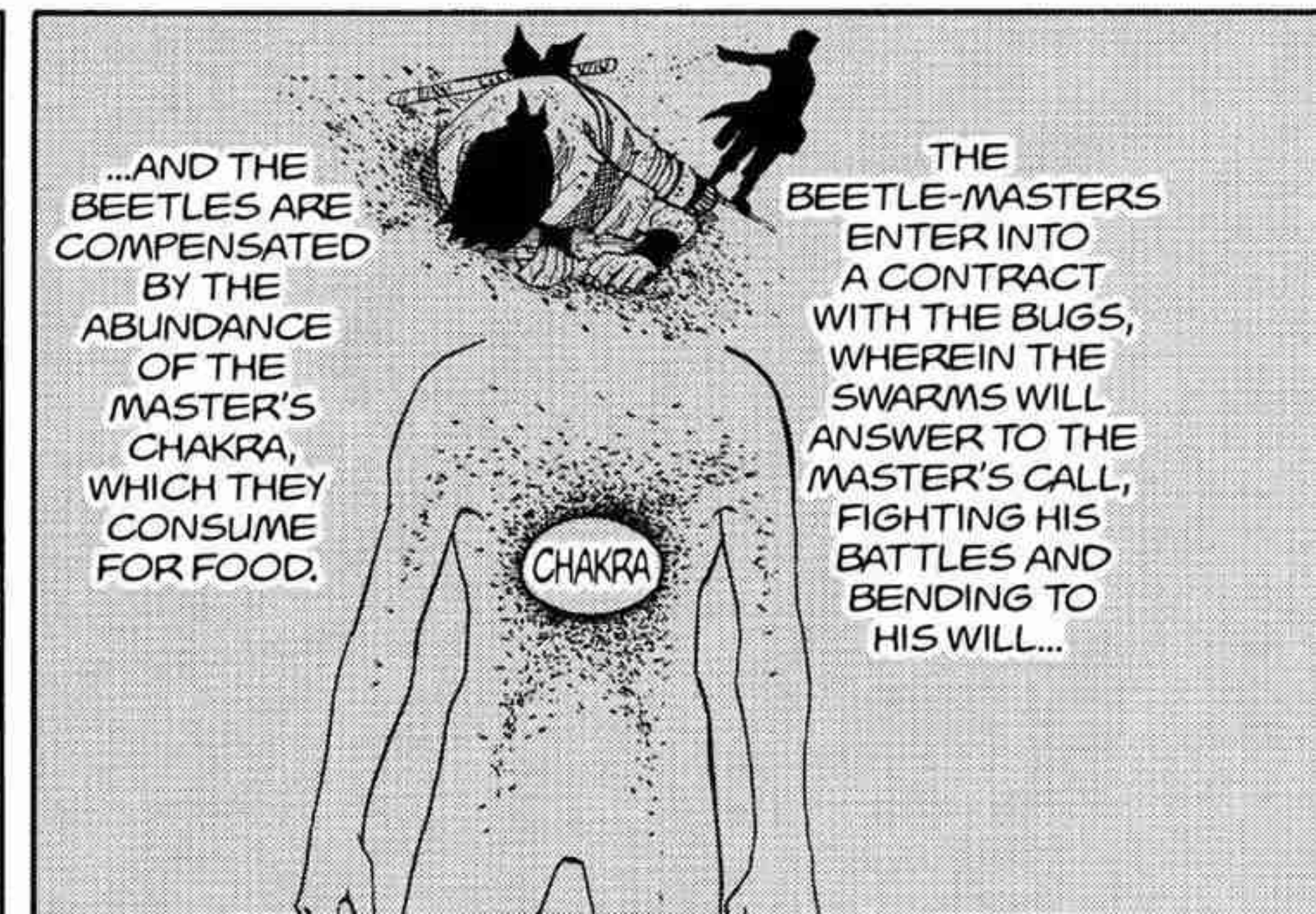
WH-WHAT?!

HIS WHOLE BODY'S INFESTED WITH THEM!
BZZZZ
BZZZ
BZZ
BZ

THERE'S A LEGEND IN KONOHA OF A CLAN OF BEETLE-MASTERS...


I'VE HEARD THE BIRTHRIGHT OF ANYONE BORN INTO THE CLAN...
...IS THAT FROM THE MOMENT THEY ENTER THE WORLD, THEIR BODIES ARE GIVEN OVER TO THE CRAWLING VERMIN TO USE AS NESTS.
YES... NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT...

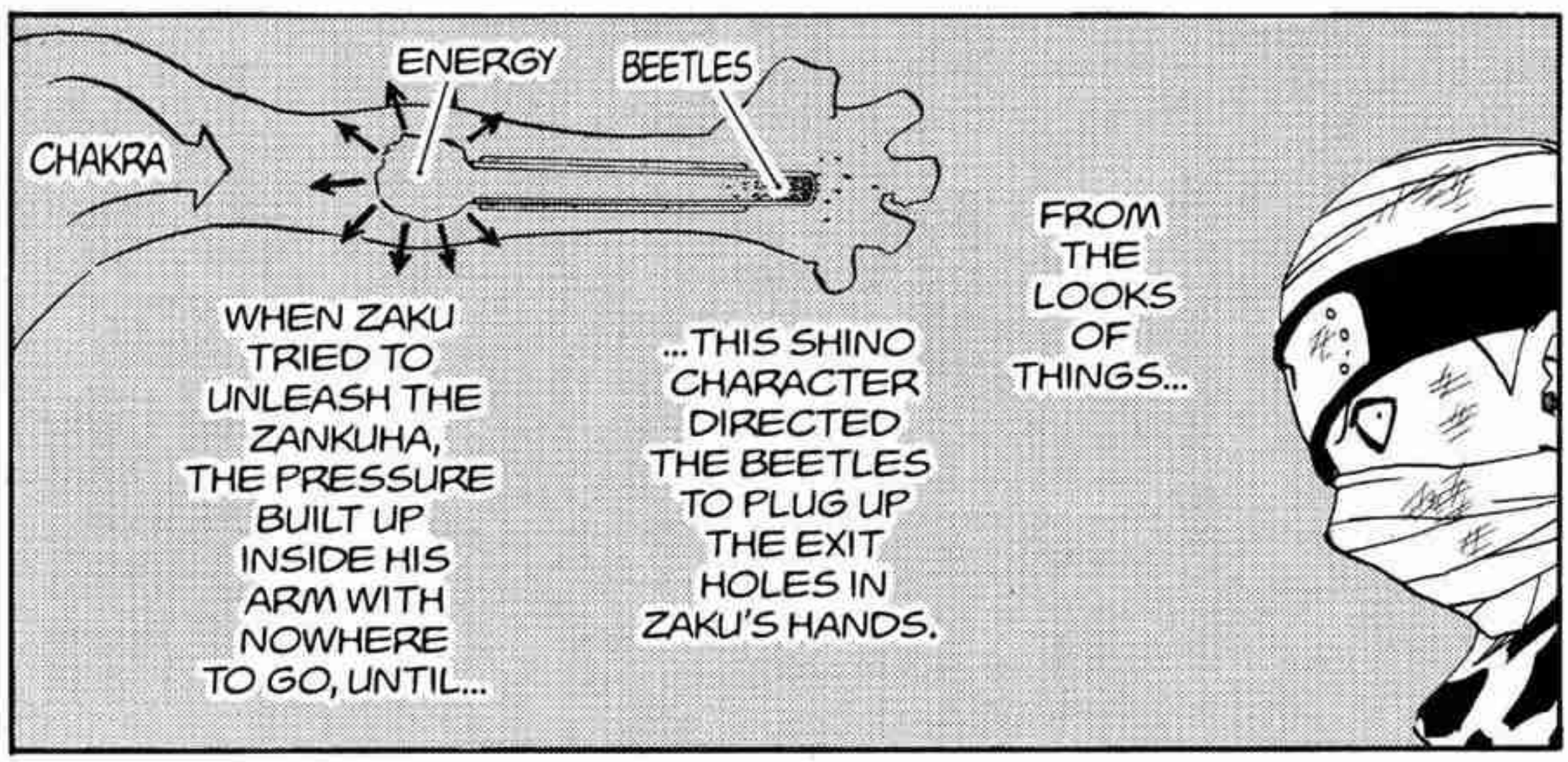
AND YOU'RE TELLING ME THAT SHINO...

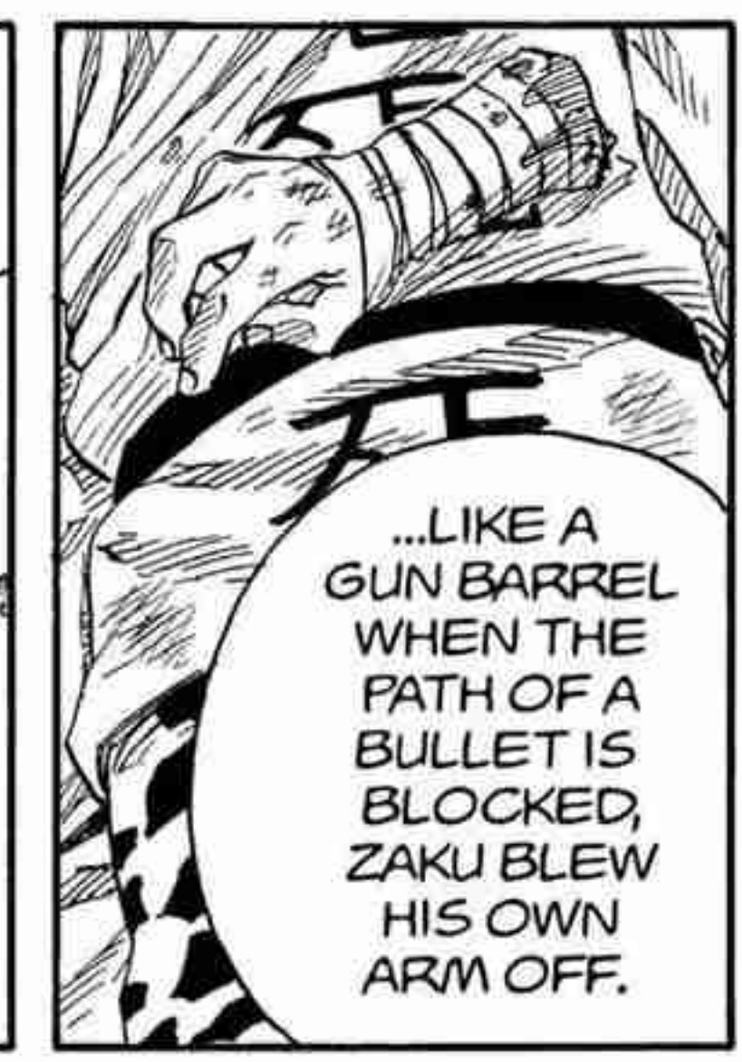

...AND THE BEETLES ARE COMPENSATED BY THE ABUNDANCE OF THE MASTER'S CHAKRA, WHICH THEY CONSUME FOR FOOD.
THE BEETLE-MASTERS ENTER INTO A CONTRACT WITH THE BUGS, WHEREIN THE SWARMS WILL ANSWER TO THE MASTER'S CALL, FIGHTING HIS BATTLES AND BENDING TO HIS WILL...
CHAKRA

POOR ZAKU...

WHY DID HIS ARMS EXPLODE?!

...IS A MEMBER OF THIS CLAN?!





THE WINNER IS ABURAME SHINO!!
OWNG
TAK
SKF

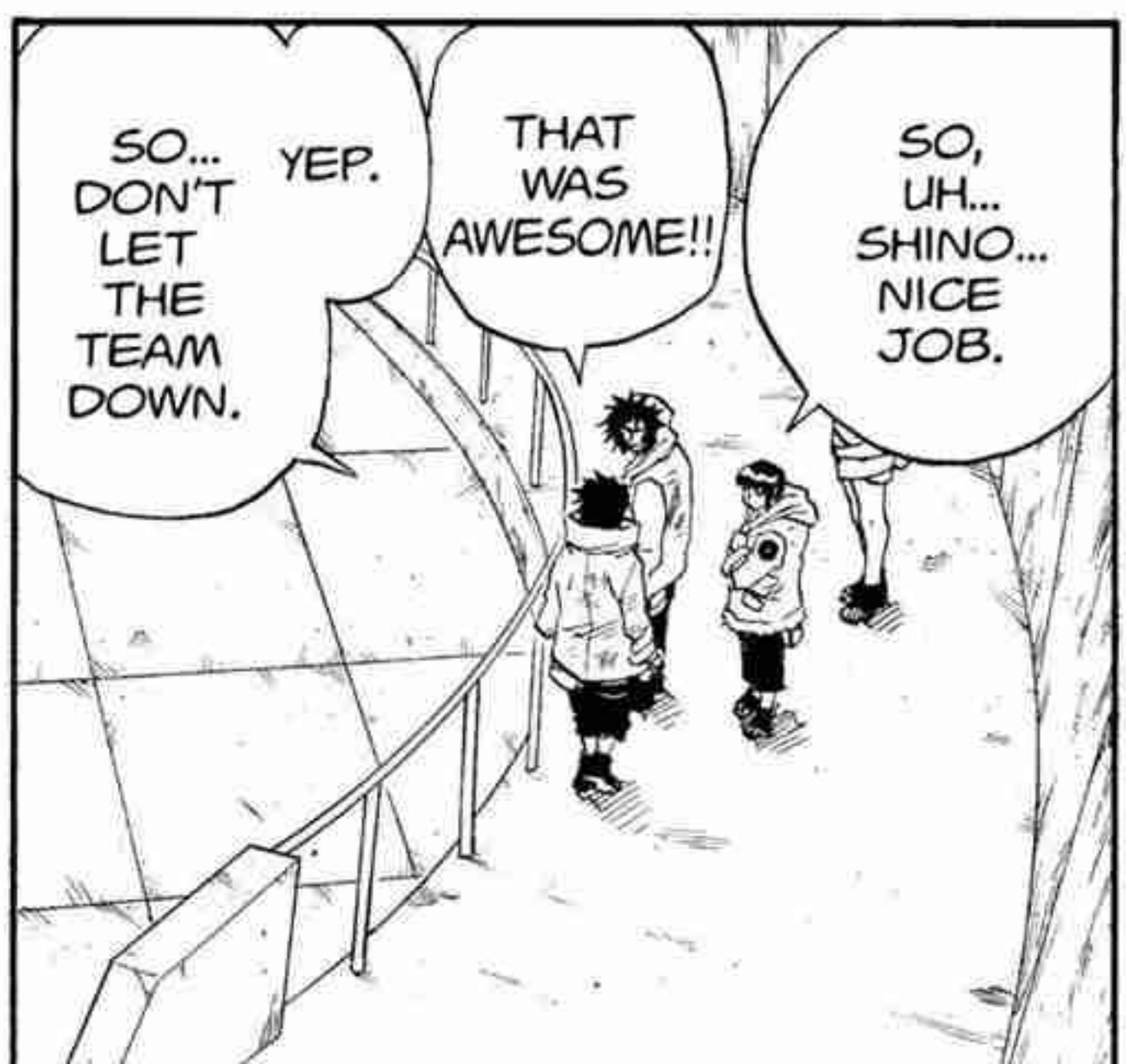
I'M MAKING IT MY BUSINESS TO ENSURE THERE'S PAYBACK.
HEH HEH...
WE DIDN'T KNOW EACH OTHER WELL... BUT HE'S A MEMBER OF MY TEAM. AND TEAMMATES LOOK OUT FOR ONE ANOTHER.

HE'S ALWAYS BEEN CREEPY, BUT...
AW, MAN. I DON'T GET IT! SINCE WHEN DID SHINO GET TO BE TOUGH?!

THAT GUY FREAKS ME OUT.
UGH...

TAK
TAK

SUDDENLY, HE'S ACTING LIKE HE'S THE BOSS OF US!!
HEY!
SKF
WOOF


SO... DON'T LET THE TEAM DOWN.
YEP.
THAT WAS AWESOME!!
SO, UH... SHINO... NICE JOB.

!!

MASTER KAKASHI!!!

YO!

SO... UHHH... WE'RE MOVING ON TO THE NEXT MATCH.

KOFF

VNN

!

MASTER KAKASHI, TELL US ABOUT SASUKE! IS HE ALL RIGHT?!

!

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, "YO"?!

OH...!

PHEW...

UNDER THE GUARD OF A BLACK OPS TEAM... BUT ASLEEP.

HE'S FINE... SOUND ASLEEP IN THE INFIRMARY EVEN AS WE SPEAK.

ON
TSURUGI MISUMI
VS
KANKURO
NG

ALL RIGHT... THEN... YOU MAY BEGIN.

!
HIM AGAIN!

...AT LAST!
MY TURN...

...
FOOL!

KANKURO... ...ISN'T TAKING THIS SERIOUSLY AT ALL!!

THIS WON'T TAKE LONG AT ALL.

SSSIP
I AGREE...

IN FACT, LET ME MAKE ONE THING PERFECTLY CLEAR... YOU'D BE BETTER OFF FORFEITING THE MATCH BEFORE YOU GET HURT.
EVEN THOUGH YOU'RE JUST A LITTLE BRAT...
...I'M NOT LETTING DOWN MY GUARD LIKE YOROI DID.

OONING
HOP
TAP
...I'LL BE FINISHED WITH YOU IN NO TIME.
DON'T TRY ANY TRICKS. I'M GOING TO WIN THIS WITH THE FIRST STRIKE!!
HOP
HEH!
BAST

SHHHR

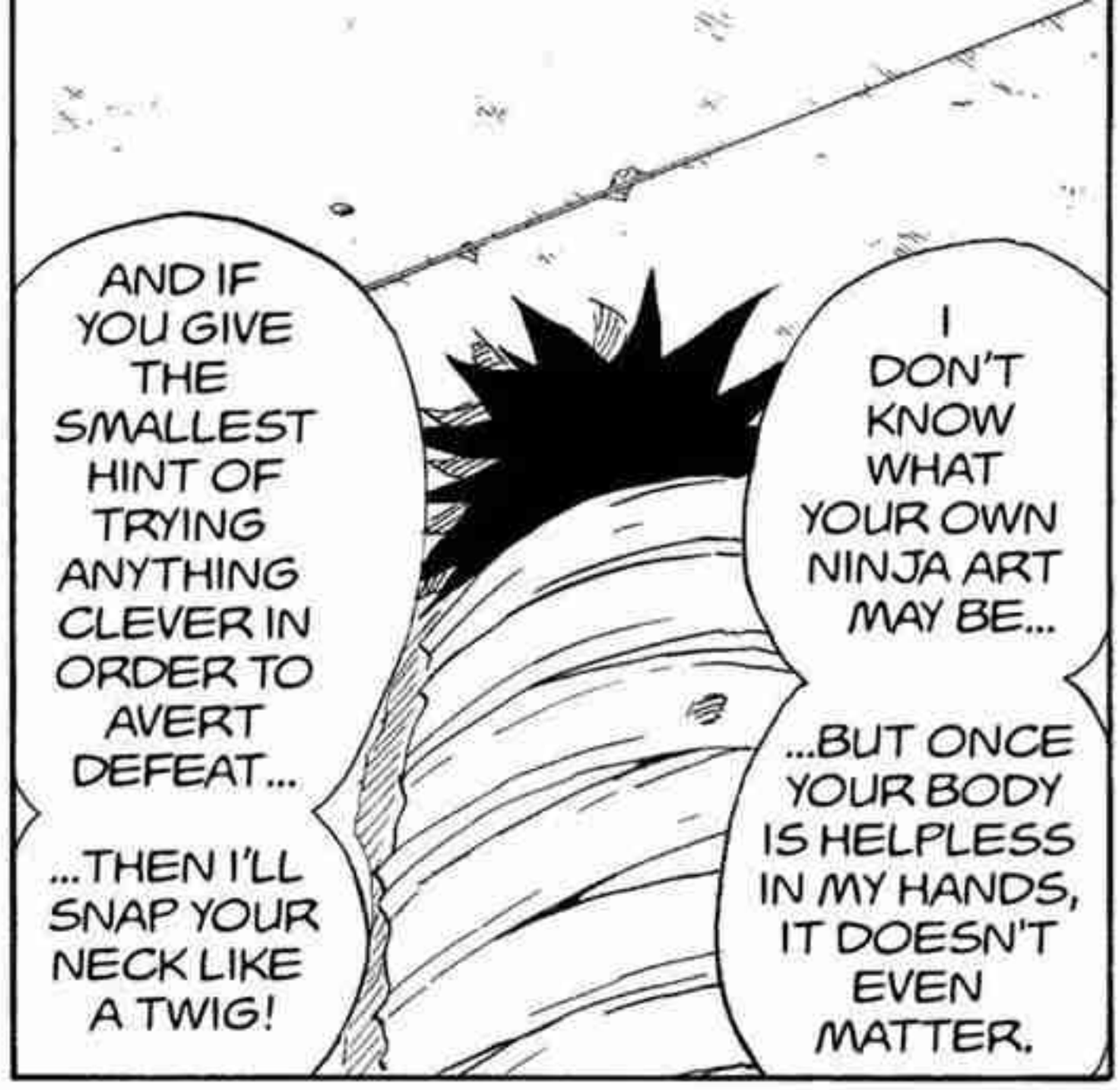
WHAT?!
!
SANK

CLASH
WHUD

THE LONGER YOU WAIT TO SURRENDER, THE TIGHTER I'LL SQUEEZE!
UNH...
AND WITH THIS SAME POWER, I CAN KEEP SQUEEZING AND CON-STRICTING UNTIL YOUR BONES CRACK!
CREAK CREAK

I CAN DISLOCATE EVERY JOINT AND MANIPULATE MY LIMP BODY BY THE POWER OF CHAKRA ALONE!
IN ORDER TO GATHER INTELLIGENCE, I'VE HAD MY BODY ALTERED SO THAT IT CAN INFILTRATE EVEN THE SMALLEST SPACE.
FLOP
FLOP
GRRR

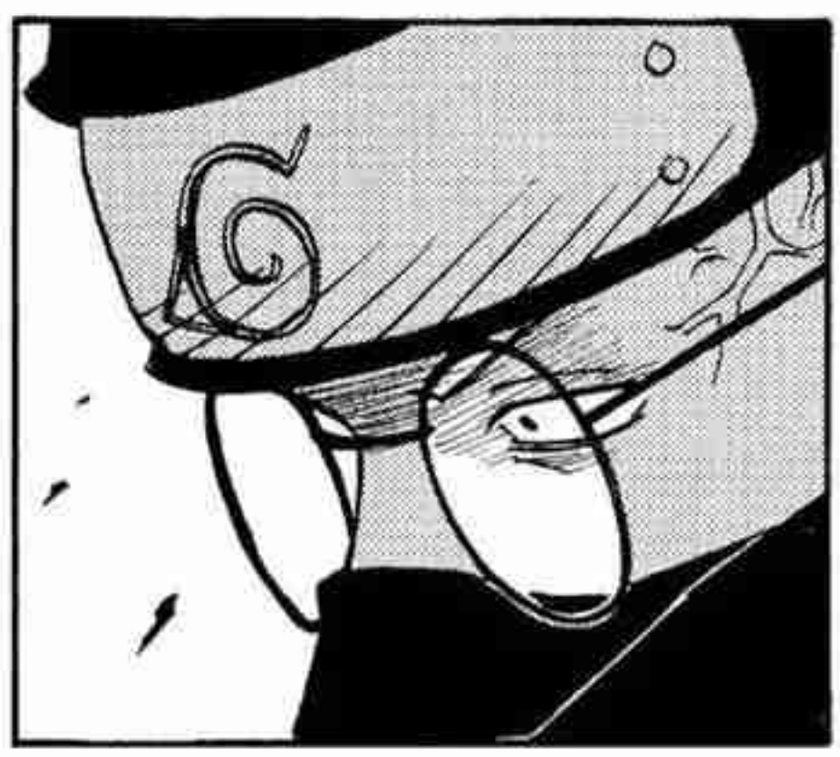
YOU'RE RUNNING OUT OF TIME...
CREEEAK


AND IF YOU GIVE THE SMALLEST HINT OF TRYING ANYTHING CLEVER IN ORDER TO AVERT DEFEAT...
...THEN I'LL SNAP YOUR NECK LIKE A TWIG!
I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOUR OWN NINJA ART MAY BE...
...BUT ONCE YOUR BODY IS HELPLESS IN MY HANDS, IT DOESN'T EVEN MATTER.

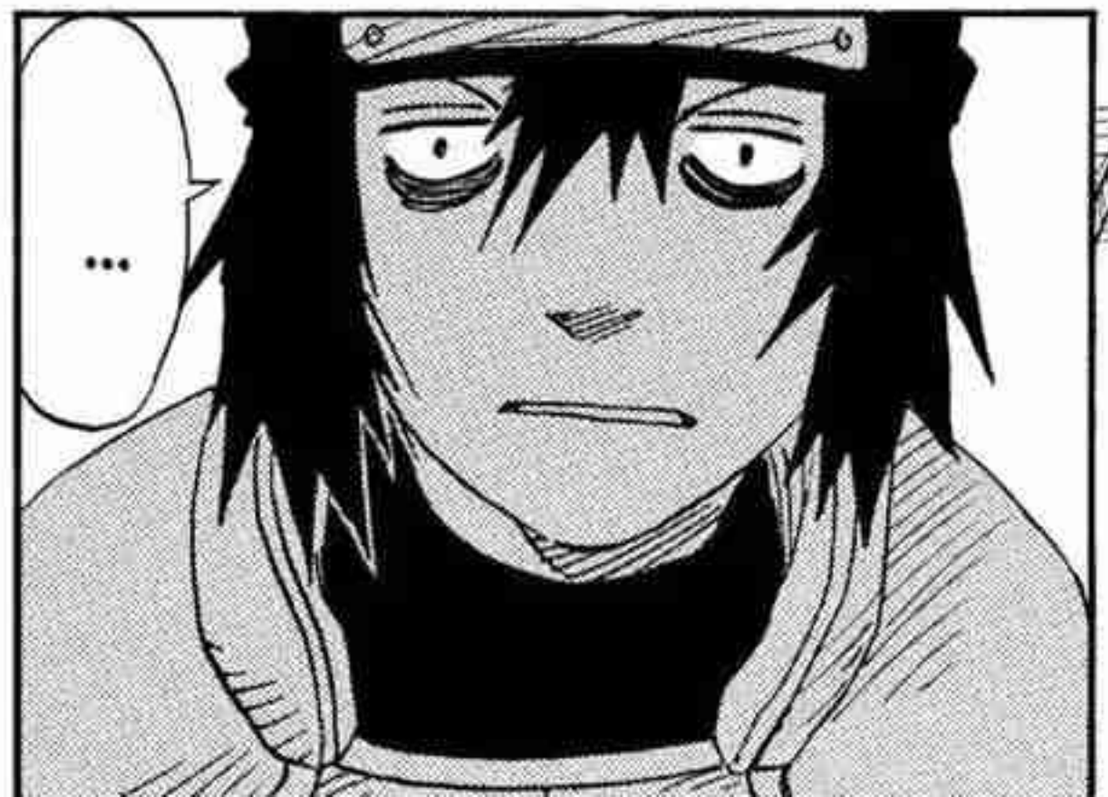
NO WAY...
HEH...

...

HUF
HUF
DO YOU? YOU'RE ABOUT TO GET YOUR WISH!



DO YOU WANT TO BE THE ONE WHO DIES...?!
!
CRUNCH
SQUEEZE
CRUNCH
AGH...
CRUNCH



SNAP

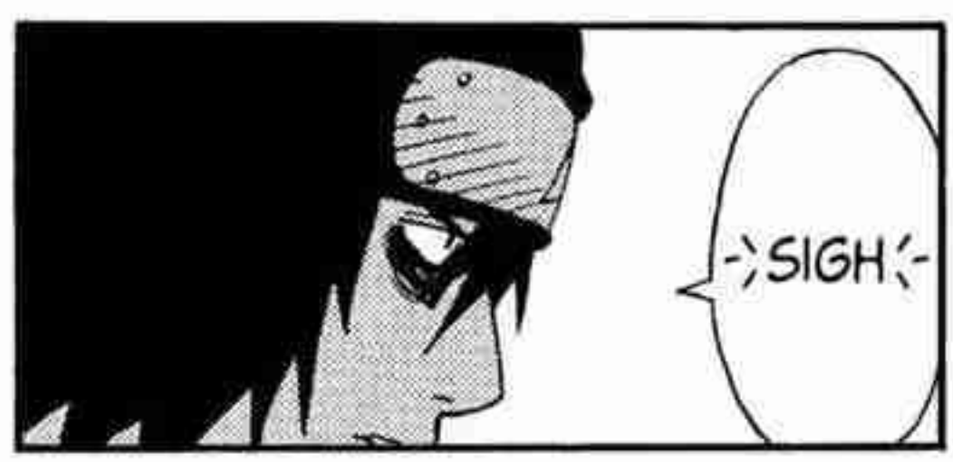
...!

FLUP FLOP

HE BROKE HIS NECK!
WHAT?!

HE JUST WOULDN'T GIVE UP... SO I KILLED HIM.
FLUPP
FLOP

愛
WHAT A WASTE.


-;SIGH;-

HAH!
THE FOOL!
...

!!

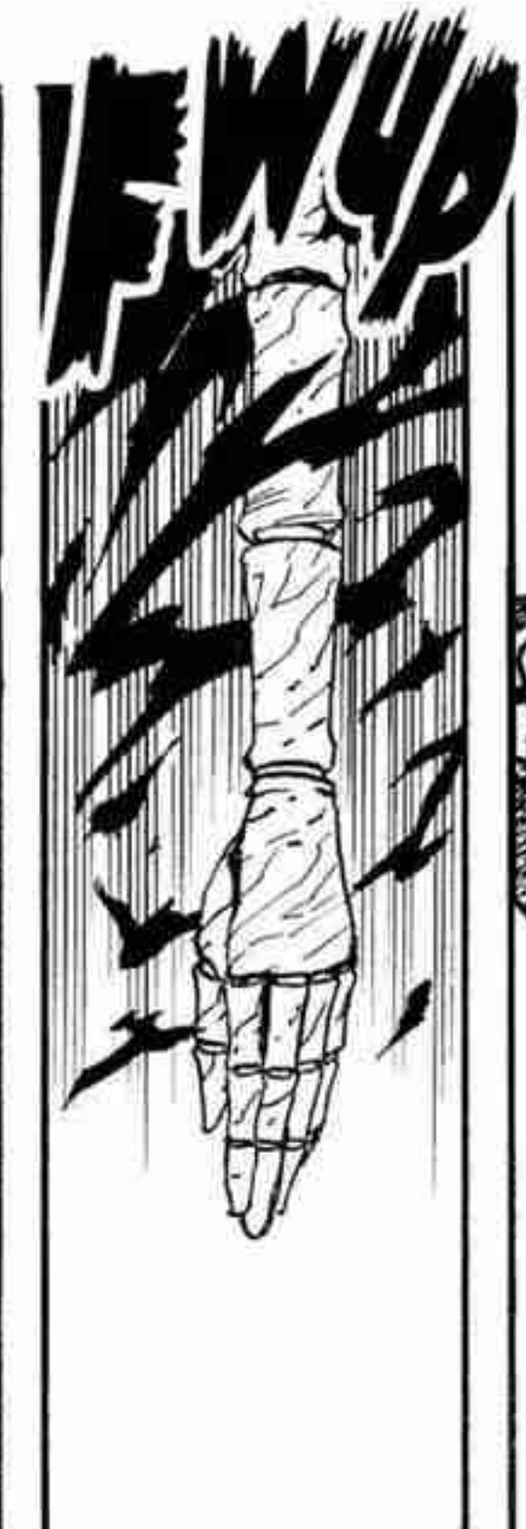
FWWW

BLINK

AND NOW I CAN RETURN THE FAVOR!! ♡

PLINK PLINK

KRACKLE

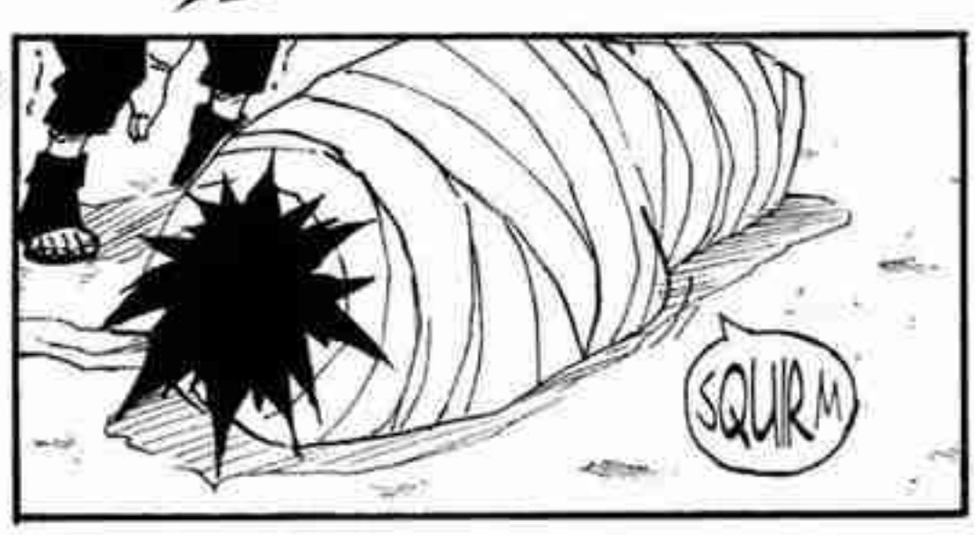


KREAK
I-IT'S JUST A DOLL... A MARIONETTE!!

SQUEE
UNH!
EEZ

FKW UU P

YARK


SQUIRM

SO THAT'S THE REAL BODY?!
!!

GLEAM
HE'S A PUPPET-MASTER!

KR AK

G-GIVE... UP...

AAAAUGH!

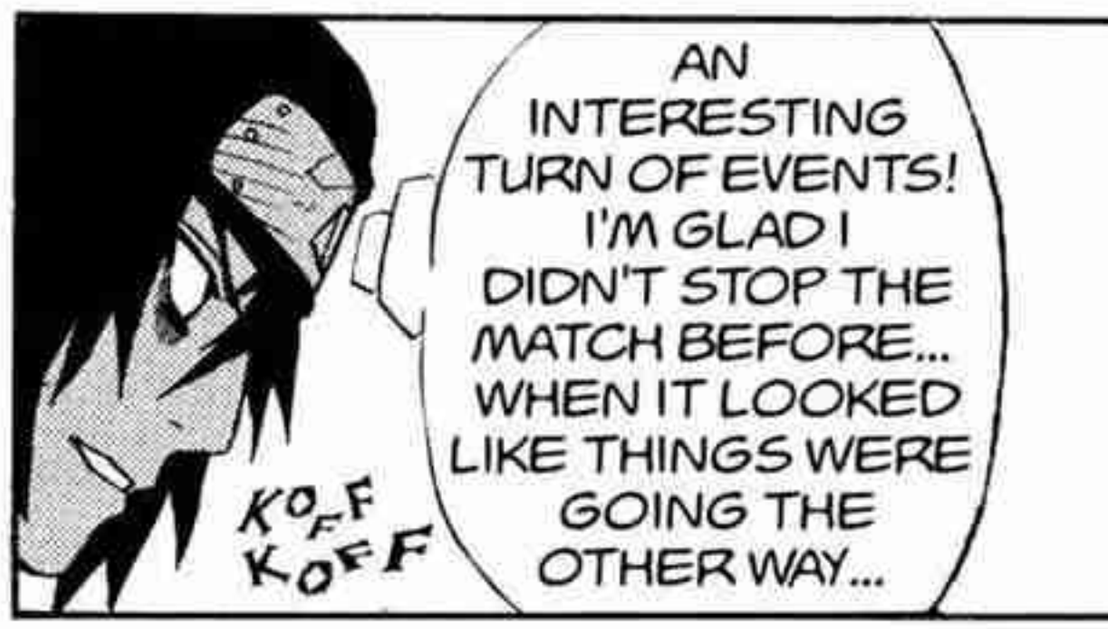
THINK HOW MUCH MORE FLEXIBLE YOU'LL BE... WITH ALL THOSE BONES OF YOURS BROKEN TO BITS.

CLENCH

FLUTTER

BUT... I'LL LEAVE YOUR NECK INTACT.

SNAP



LOOK WHO'S TALKING.

GOOD ONE, MASTER!!

WHOA! WHOA!

THIS IS LIKE A NEVER-ENDING FREAK SHOW!

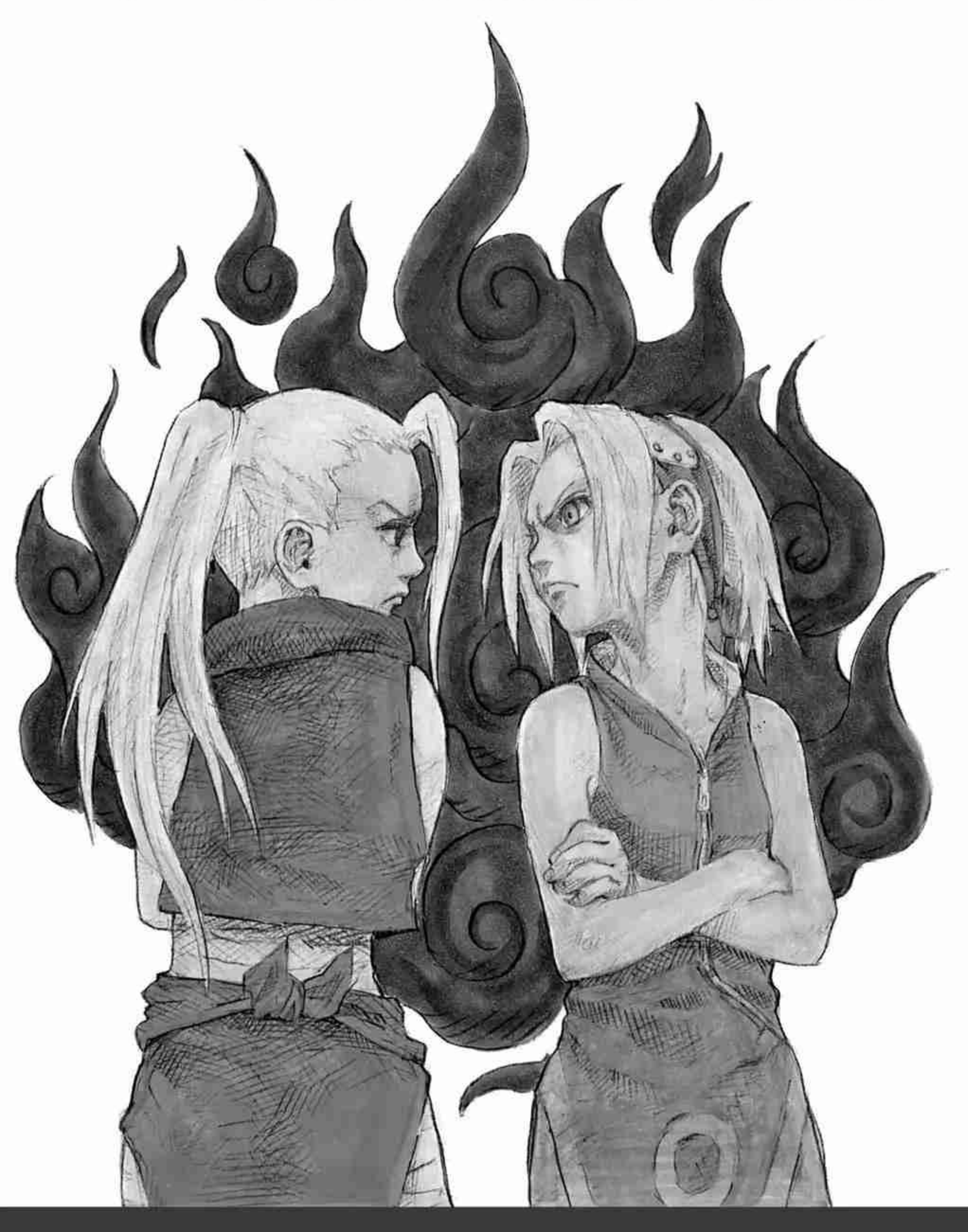
IN ANY EVENT... IT'S TIME FOR THE FOURTH MATCH.

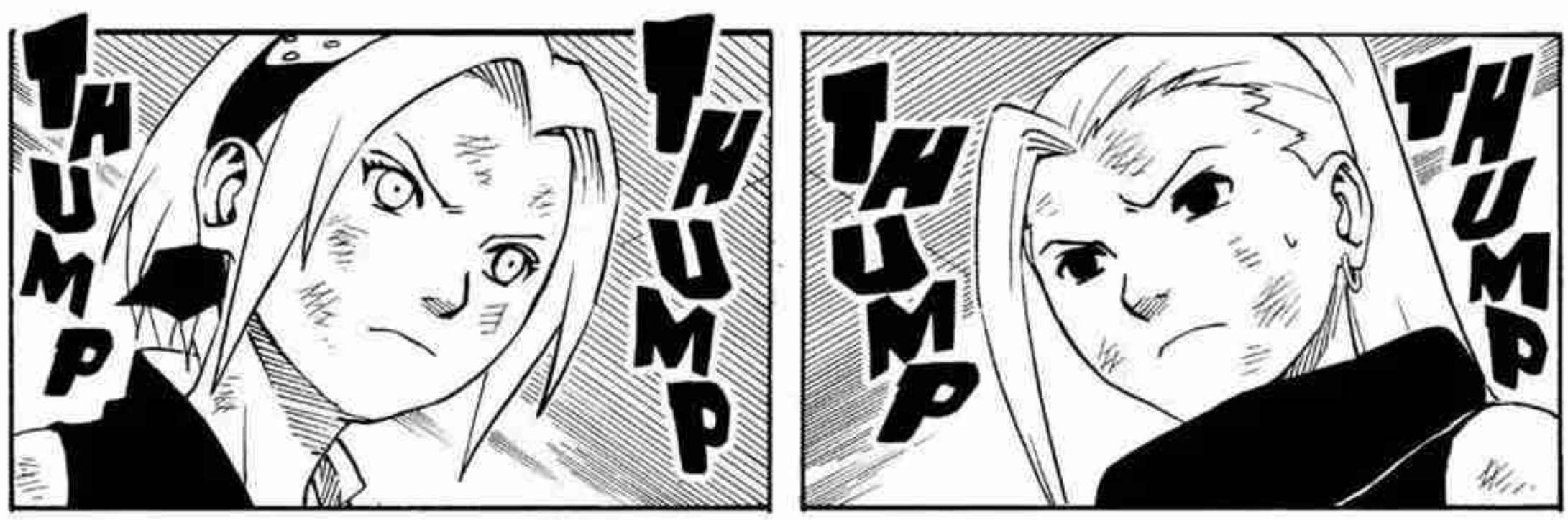
HARUNO SAKURA

VS

YAMANAKA INO

Number 71: The Insurmountable Wall...!!




THUMP
THUMP
THUMP
THUMP

!

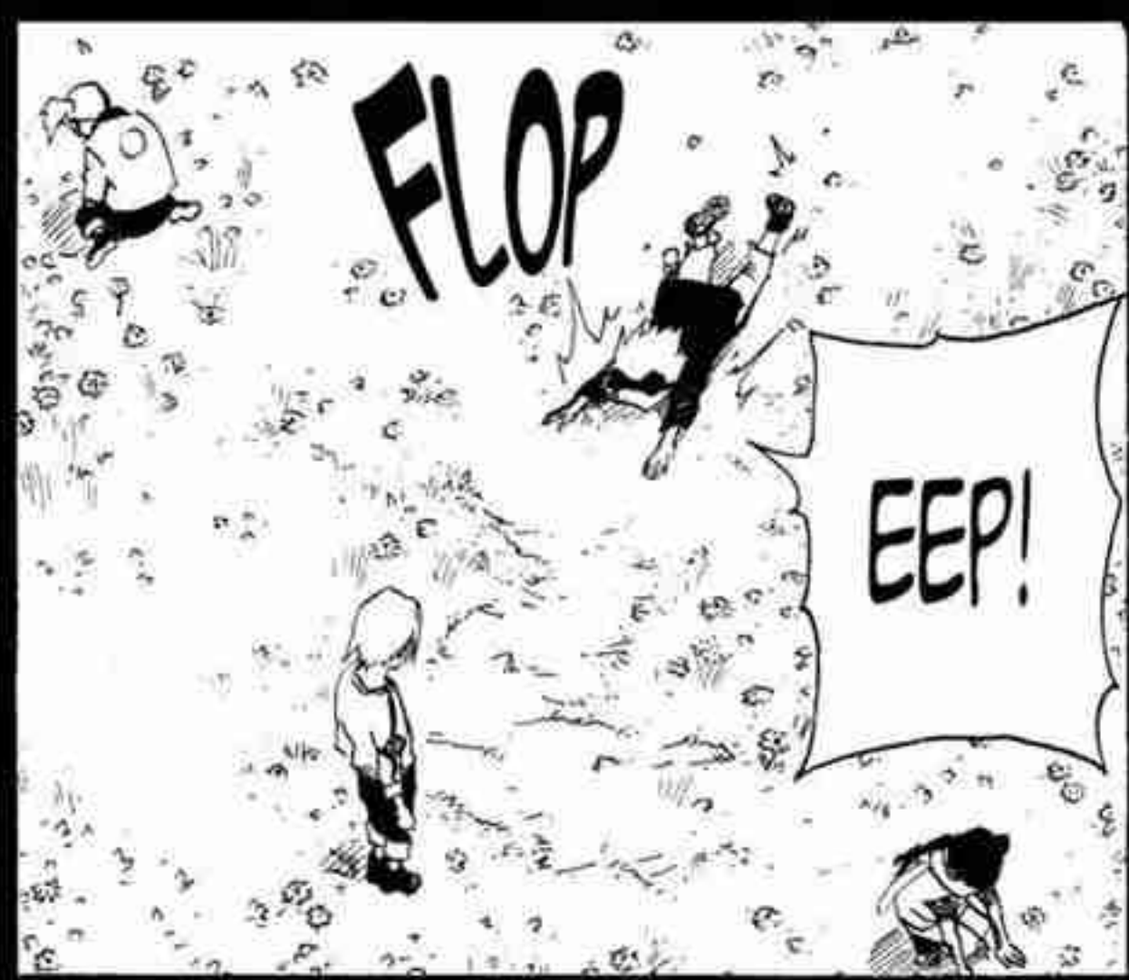
SLIP
YANK

...GOING HEAD TO HEAD. I NEVER SAW IT COMING.
SO, SAKURA... IT'S YOU AND ME...

*KUNOICHI = FEMALE SHINOBI

...BUT THE FEMININE ARTS AND WOMANLY WILES AS WELL.

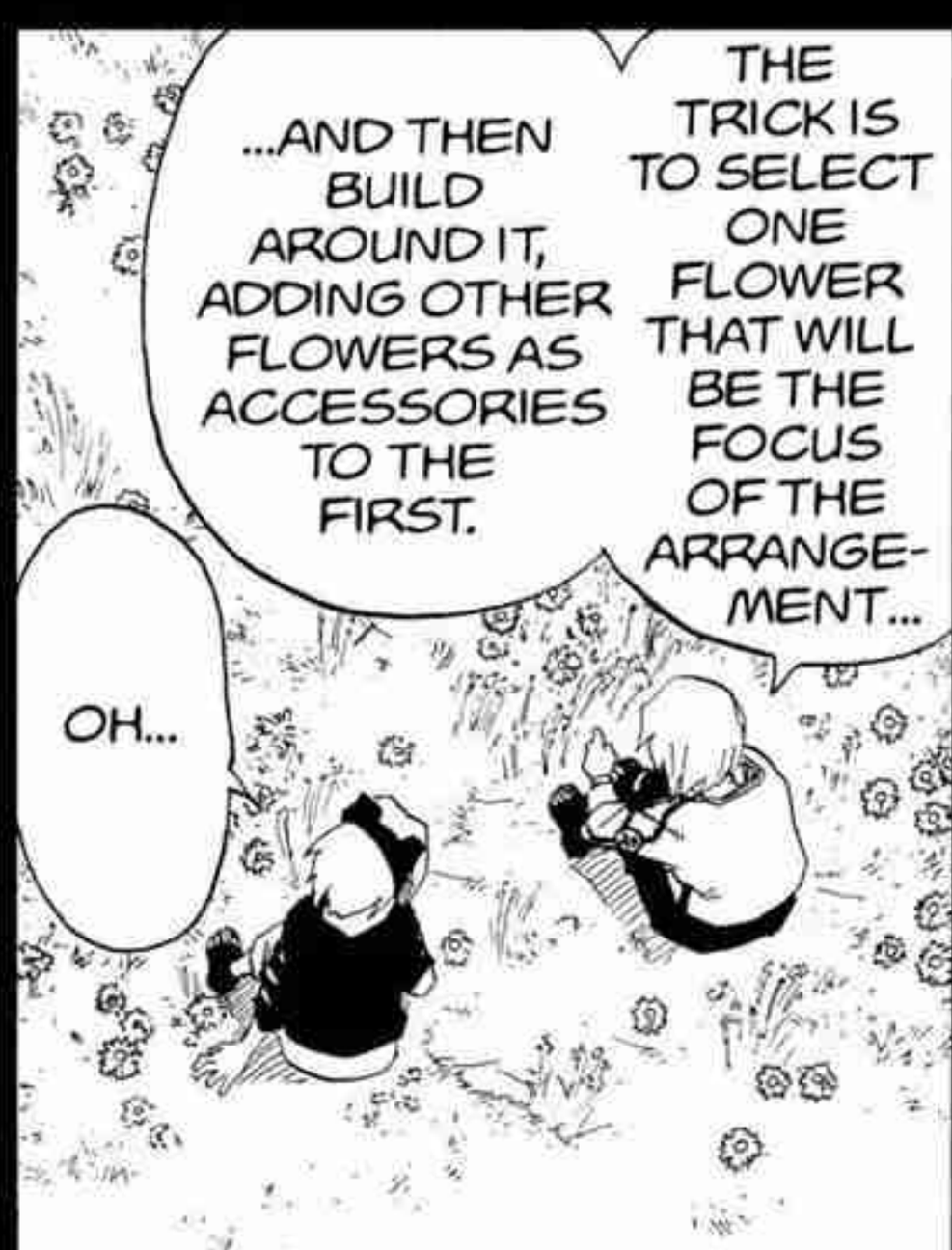
A KUNOICHI NEEDS TO MASTER NOT ONLY THE NINJUTSU THAT EVERY MALE NINJA LEARNS...


FLOP
EEP!

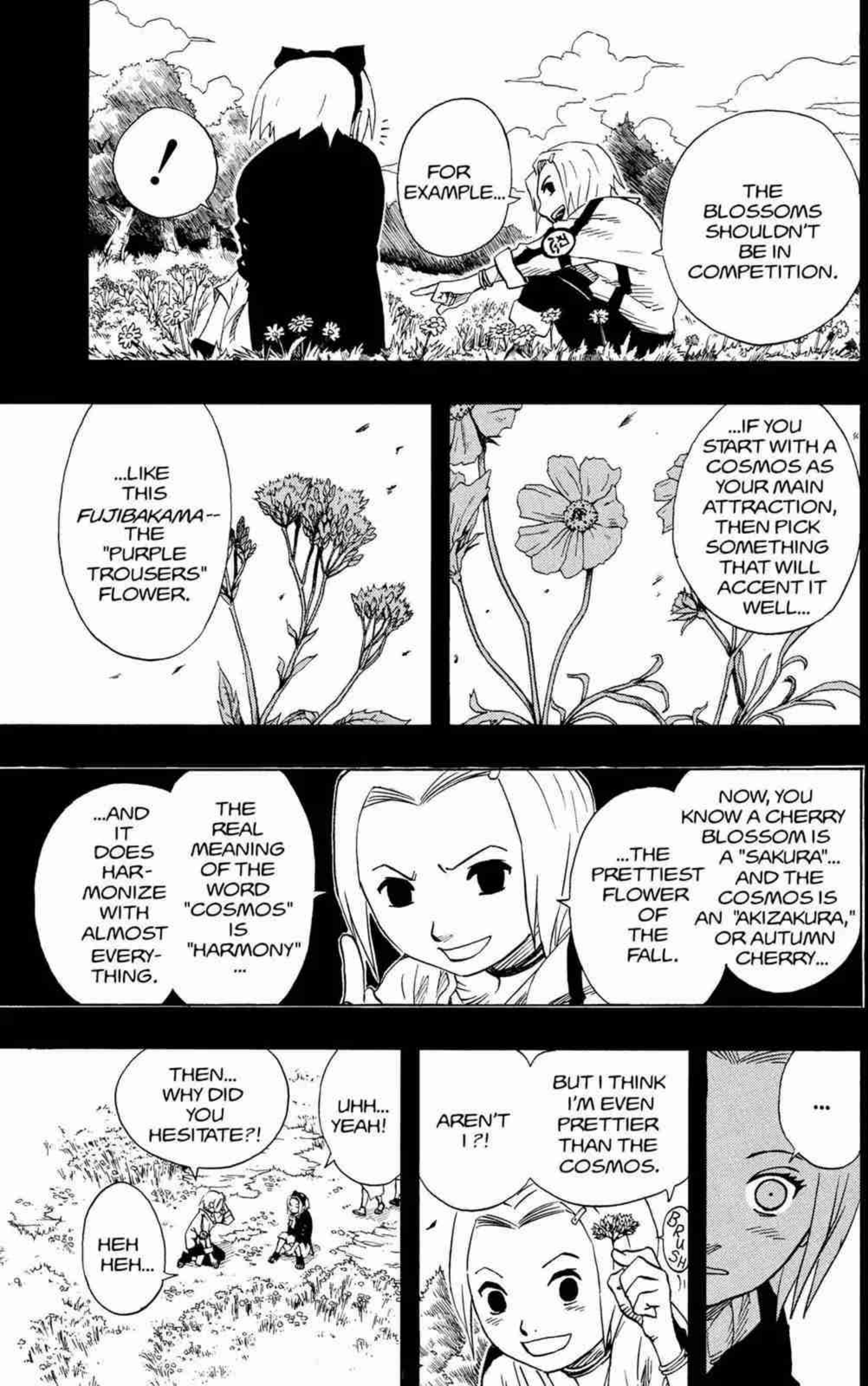
HEY, INO! WAIT FOR ME!
TAK
TAK

!
WHAT ABOUT YOU, INO?
I'M NO GOOD AT THIS STUFF...

WHOA!
CLUMSY!!
PLUCK


...AND THEN BUILD AROUND IT, ADDING OTHER FLOWERS AS ACCESSORIES TO THE FIRST.
THE TRICK IS TO SELECT ONE FLOWER THAT WILL BE THE FOCUS OF THE ARRANGE-MENT...
OH...

THIS STUFF'S A BREEZE, ONCE YOU GET THE HANG OF IT.
OH, COME ON SAKURA, THAT'S PATHETIC! HOW CAN YOU BE BAD WITH FLOWERS WHEN YOUR NAME MEANS "CHERRY BLOSSOM"?
REALLY?


!
FOR EXAMPLE...
THE BLOSSOMS SHOULDN'T BE IN COMPETITION.
...LIKE THIS FUJIBAKAMA-- THE "PURPLE TROUSERS" FLOWER.
...IF YOU START WITH A COSMOS AS YOUR MAIN ATTRACTION, THEN PICK SOMETHING THAT WILL ACCENT IT WELL...
...AND IT DOES HAR-MONIZE WITH ALMOST EVERY-THING.
THE REAL MEANING OF THE WORD "COSMOS" IS "HARMONY" ...
...THE PRETTIEST FLOWER OF THE FALL.
NOW, YOU KNOW A CHERRY BLOSSOM IS A "SAKURA"... AND THE COSMOS IS AN "AKIZAKURA," OR AUTUMN CHERRY...
THEN... WHY DID YOU HESITATE?!
UHH... YEAH!
HEH HEH...
AREN'T I?!
BUT I THINK I'M EVEN PRETTIER THAN THE COSMOS.
BRUSH
...

GRRRR
...

WHAT MAKES YOU THINK YOU'RE WORTH IT?
SCOWL
YOU'RE DOING A LOT OF PRIMPING LATELY, AREN'T YOU?
SHIVER

SSHUNG

...LITTLE MISS BILL-BOARD BROW?!
HAVING FUN...
!!

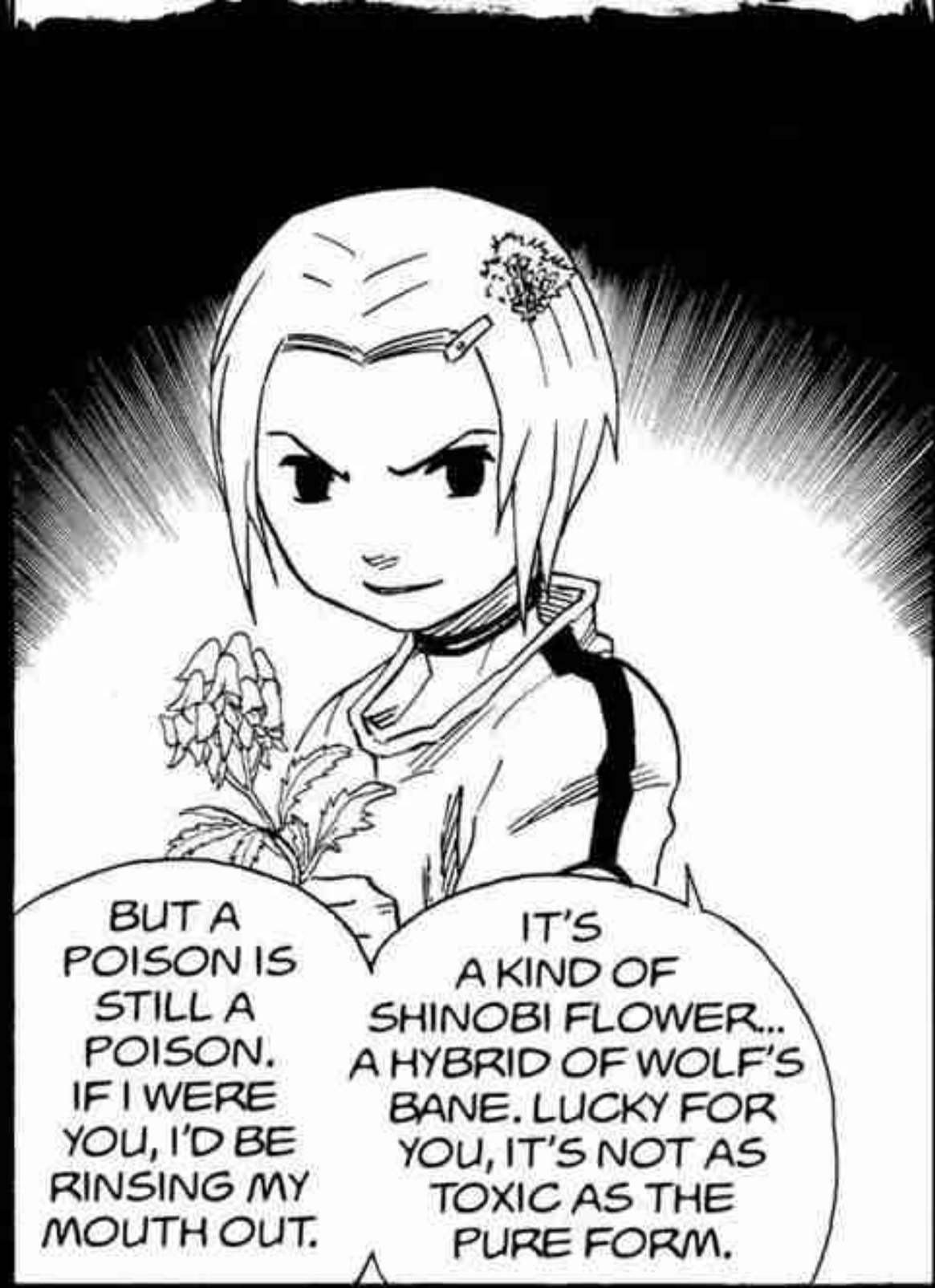
MY BAD. YOU HAVE SUCH A STRAIGHT, UN-CURVED SHAPE FROM SHOULDERS TO KNEES...
POOR AMI!!
...I THOUGHT YOU WERE A BUD VASE! ♡
WHOP

MMRFL! INO!!

THUK
-;GAGK;-

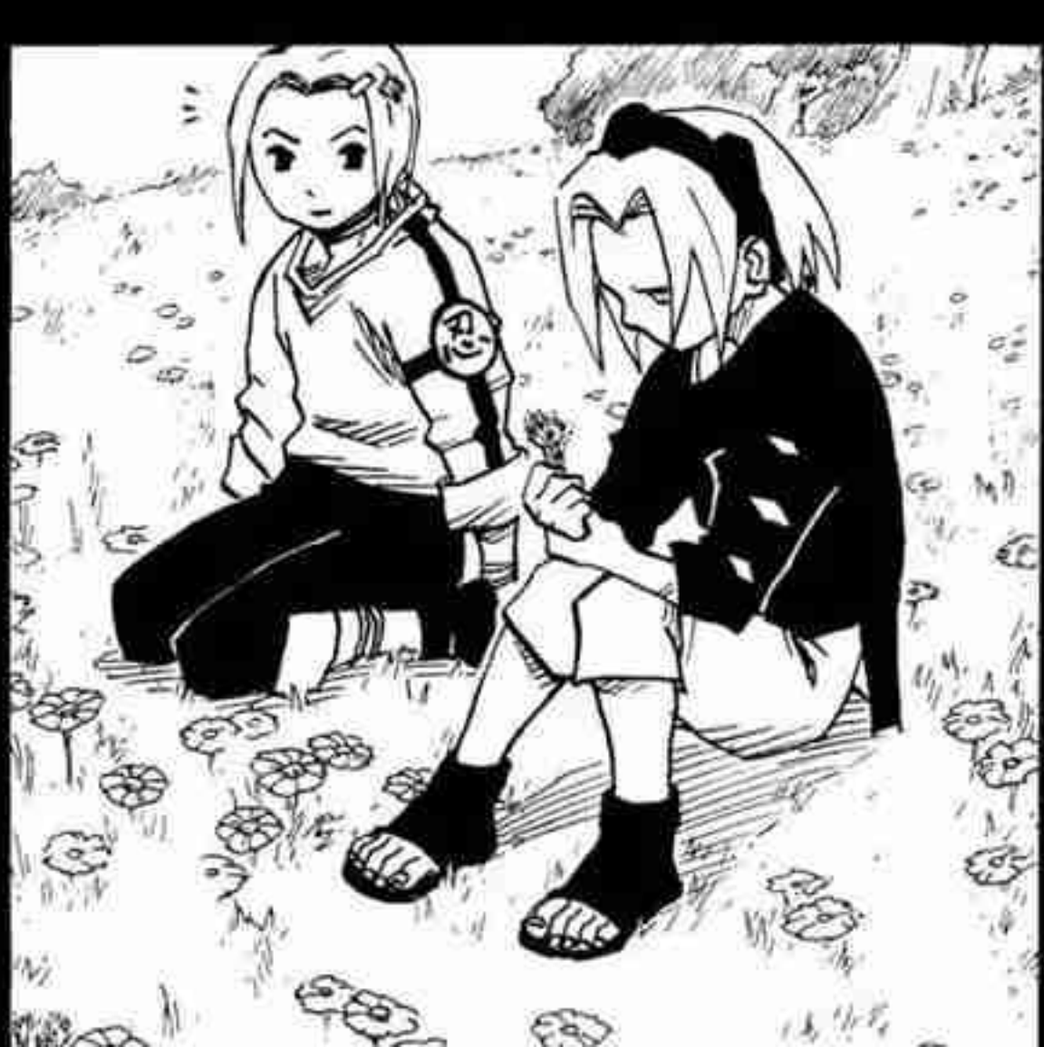
♡ HEH... THE PART THAT'S POISONOUS IS ACTUALLY THE ROOT...
EEEK! TEACHER--!
DASH DASH

...


BUT A POISON IS STILL A POISON. IF I WERE YOU, I'D BE RINSING MY MOUTH OUT.
IT'S A KIND OF SHINOBI FLOWER... A HYBRID OF WOLF'S BANE. LUCKY FOR YOU, IT'S NOT AS TOXIC AS THE PURE FORM.

AND USING A FLOWER AS A THROWING STAR WAS AMAZING NINJUTSU!
INO IS SO COOL. SHE'S CUTE, AND SHE'S SMART... AND SHE HAS SUCH GOOD FASHION SENSE!

!



BY COMPAR-ISON, I FEEL LIKE A SUCH A...

...

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!

YOU'RE STILL A BUD!
I DON'T THINK YOU'RE EVEN A FULL-FLEDGED FLOWER YET...

IF YOU'RE A COSMOS, INO...
...THEN I GUESS I'M LIKE THE PURPLE TROUSERS.

...

HEH HEH... I GUESS SO!
...

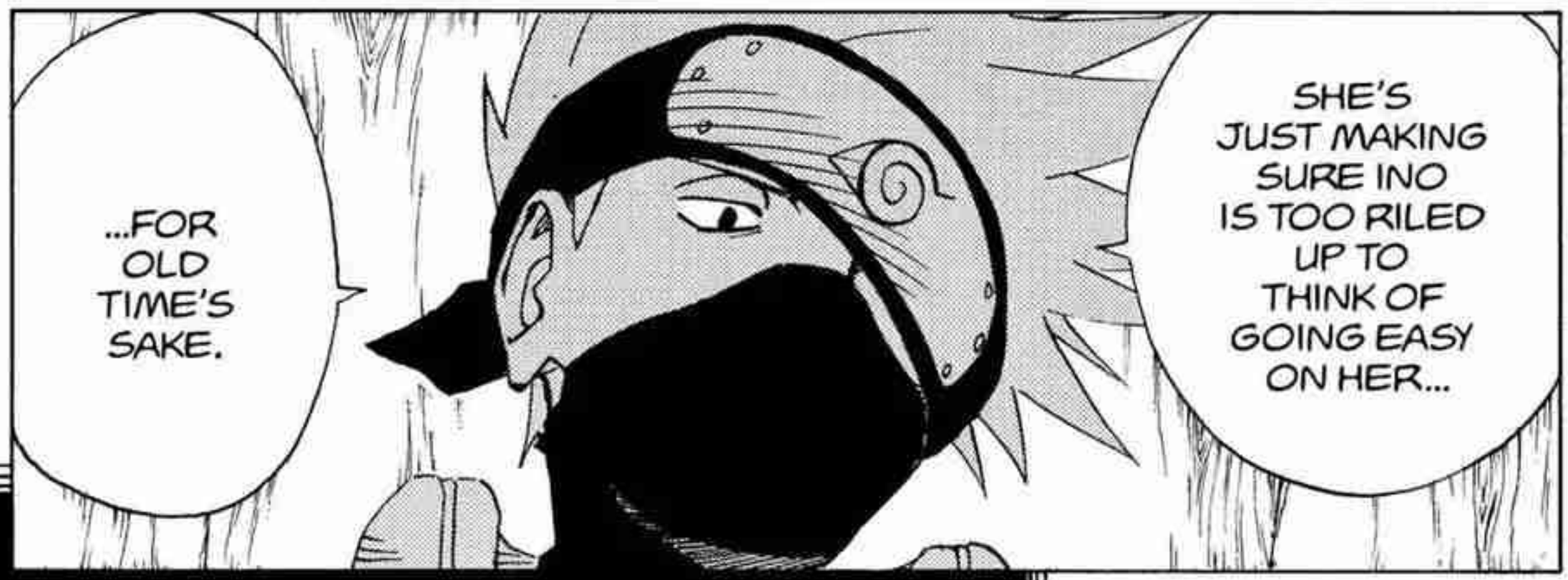
!

AND I'M NOT THE WEAK, NEEDY LITTLE GIRL I USED TO BE. YOU'RE NOT EVEN ON MY RADAR NOW.
YOU'RE NOT EVEN HIS TYPE!
WHAT--?!
I'M NEVER LETTING YOU ANYWHERE NEAR SASUKE.
UNDER-STAND THIS...
!
BLINK
DON'T COP AN ATTITUDE WITH ME, YOU LITTLE CRYBABY.
SAKURA... I THINK YOU'VE FORGOTTEN WHO YOU'RE TALKING TO.

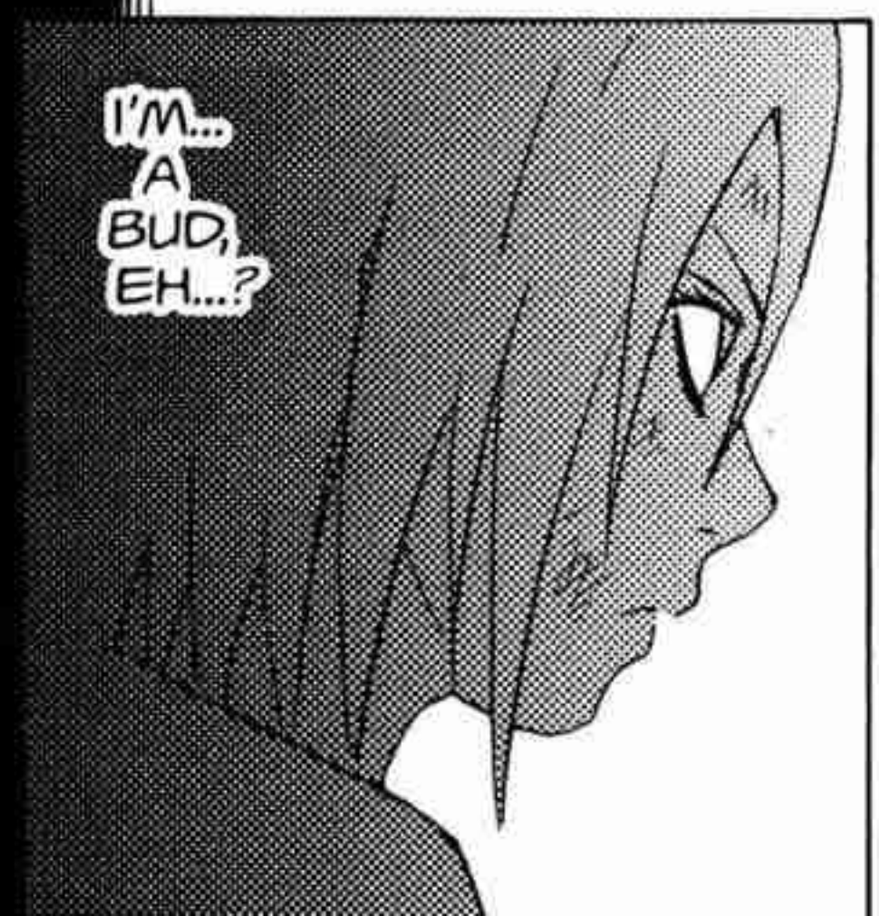
HMM...

THAT INO CHICK SCARES ME SILLY!
AW, MAN!
SAKURA JUST CROSSED THE LINE.

...AND SHE'S NOT THE KIND WHO'D BULLY SOMEONE JUST TO BE CRUEL.
SAKURA'S NOT TRYING TO THROW HER WEIGHT AROUND...


...FOR OLD TIME'S SAKE.
SHE'S JUST MAKING SURE INO IS TOO RILED UP TO THINK OF GOING EASY ON HER...

YEAH?
INO...?


I'M... A BUD, EH...?

READ THIS WAY
SMIRK
UMM UMM
BLINK
WH-WHY DID... YOU...
...GIVE ME THIS RIBBON?
...I THOUGHT IT WAS A SHAME...
...TO SEE A BUD LIKE YOU DYING ON THE VINE.
BECAUSE... HEH...
?
YOU MIGHT END UP...
WHAT'S THE POINT IN BEING A FLOWER IF YOU'RE NEVER GOING TO BLOOM?

...BEING AN EVEN PRETTIER FLOWER THAN A COSMOS!

HUH? SAKURA, ARE YOU CRYING? WHAT'S WRONG?

OKAY!

ANYWAY... LET'S FINISH GATHERING THE FLOWERS!

NOTHING. I...I GOT SAND IN MY EYES WHEN I FELL.

INO... THANK YOU!

...

SNIF

THAT'S WHY, WHEN WE FIGHT, I'M GIVING IT EVERYTHING THAT I'VE GOT.

I WANTED TO BE JUST LIKE YOU. WORKING TOWARD THAT GOAL IS WHAT MADE ME GOOD ENOUGH TO BE HERE TODAY.

...THINKING HOW COOL IT WOULD BE IF ALL THE NICE THINGS YOU SAID WERE TRUE.

INO... THAT DAY, YOU HELPED ME TO BELIEVE IN MYSELF, AND I'VE HUNG ON TO THAT EVER SINCE...

...WILL MEAN A THING UNLESS I'VE EQUALED YOU... AND SURPASSED YOU!!
NONE OF THIS...
HUNH?!
WELL, NARUTO... RIVALRY IS A TRICKY BUSINESS... NOT THAT I WOULD KNOW.
-SIGH-
HE JUST CAN'T SEE THAT HE'S EXACTLY THE SAME WAY...
...WHEN IT COMES TO SASUKE.
WHAT ARE THEY GETTING SO INTENSE ABOUT?!
...I DON'T CARE WHAT IT TAKES. YOU'RE NOT GOING TO SHOW ME UP!!
THAT GOES DOUBLE FOR ME, SAKURA...
SO, INO... YOU'LL NEVER BEAT ME NOW.
SASUKE AND I ARE ON THE SAME TEAM!

THIS IS YOURS.
!
...THE RIBBON ...

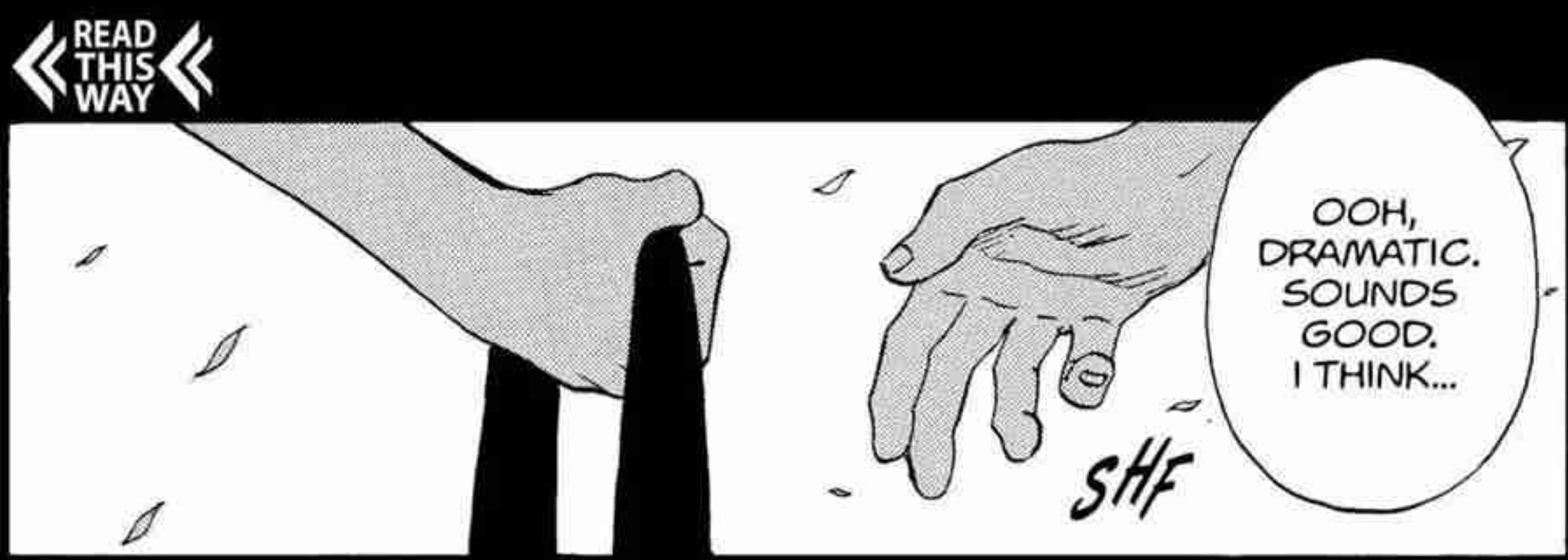
...

I'M NOT YOUR LITTLE TAG-ALONG ANYMORE, INO!
THAT WAS A GIFT! YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO KEEP IT! BESIDES, YOU STILL NEED SOMETHING TO HOLD YOUR HAIR BACK... THAT HEADBAND'S SUPPOSED TO GO ACROSS YOUR FOREHEAD!

...

I WON'T WEAR MY LEAF HEADBAND ACROSS MY FORE-HEAD...
...UNTIL THE DAY I CAN STAND UP TO YOU AS A FULL-FLEDGED SHINOBI.

!


READ THIS WAY
OOH, DRAMATIC. SOUNDS GOOD. I THINK...
SHF

...I'LL DO THE SAME.

...SAKURA.
GET IT...

LET'S DO THIS... FAIR AND SQUARE!

ONGOING

!!
SHE'S SO FAST!!

POUND
POUND
POUND
...AND THEN UP I GO!

I'LL FOCUS ALL OF MY CHAKRA WITHIN MY FEET...

WHOP
AIEE!!

THE GLOVES ARE OFF!!
IF THAT'S THE WAY YOU WANT IT, FINE BY ME.
SHF

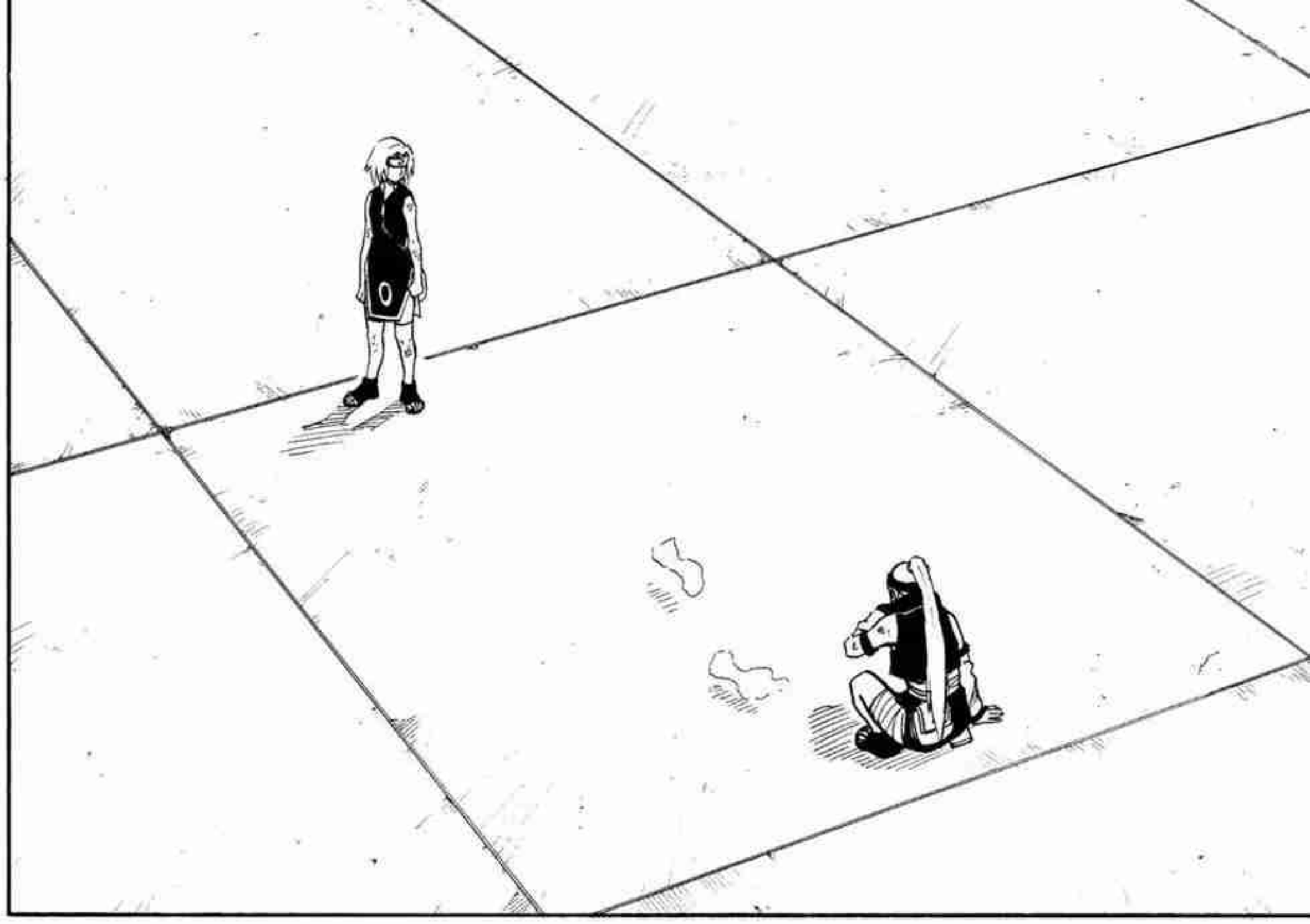
I KNOW YOU CAN DO BETTER THAN THIS!
I MAY HAVE BEEN A CRYBABY BACK IN THE DAY... BUT WHO'S CRYING NOW? COME ON, INO... STOP HOLDING BACK.
SKFFF...

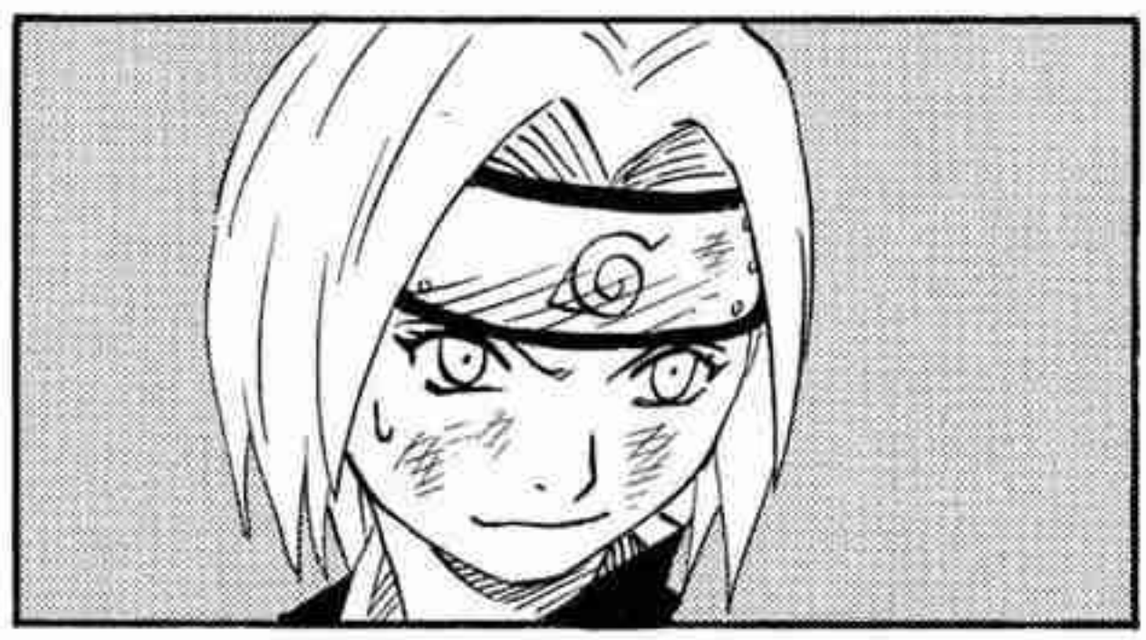
THE WORLD OF KISHIMOTO MASASHI
MY PERSONAL HISTORY, PART 7.3

NOWADAYS, EVERY GAMER IS FAMILIAR WITH COMMAND-CONTROLLED ROLE-PLAYING VIDEO GAMES... BUT WHEN *DRAGON QUEST* CAME ALONG, NO ONE HAD EVER SEEN SUCH A THING. IT SEEMED COMPLETELY ALIEN TO ME, AND I HAD TROUBLE UNDERSTANDING IT. EVENTUALLY, THOUGH, MY BROTHER AND I LEARNED (OR THOUGHT WE HAD) THE SKILLS NECESSARY FOR COMPLETE MASTERY OF THE GAME. SO ONE DAY, WE WERE BLISSED OUT PLAYING *DRAGON QUEST* FOR ABOUT A FOUR-HOUR STRETCH... AND THEN, BEING IDIOTS, WE SHUT THE SYSTEM OFF BEFORE REALIZING WE HAD NEVER BOTHERED TO FIND OUT ABOUT THE ALL-IMPORTANT "SPELL FOR RESTORING LIFE" COMMAND. WE WERE UTTERLY DESPONDENT, BUT THEN MY FATHER SHOWED UP AND SURPRISED US BY ASKING TO TRY OUT THE GAME HIMSELF. WE WERE SO EXCITED THAT HE WANTED TO JOIN IN THE FUN, AND ONE OF MY FONDEST MEMORIES IS OF THE THREE OF US PLAYING *DRAGON QUEST* IN AN ALL-NIGHT MARATHON SESSION.

MY FATHER, WHO HAD PREVIOUSLY SHOWN A COMPLETE LACK OF INTEREST IN GAMES, FELL DEEPLY IN LOVE WITH *DRAGON QUEST*, WHICH KIND OF AMAZED ME, BECAUSE FOR ME IT WAS ONLY A PASSING FANCY. THE GAME WAS A HUGE SUCCESS AND HAS CONTINUED TO SPAWN SEQUEL AFTER SEQUEL. IN FACT, THE LAST TIME I CALLED MY PARENTS (A RARE OCCURRENCE THESE DAYS), MY FATHER ANSWERED THE PHONE AND WE TALKED FOR SOME TIME. IT SEEMS HE HAS JUST COMPLETED *DRAGON QUEST 7*.

Number 72: Rivals...zz



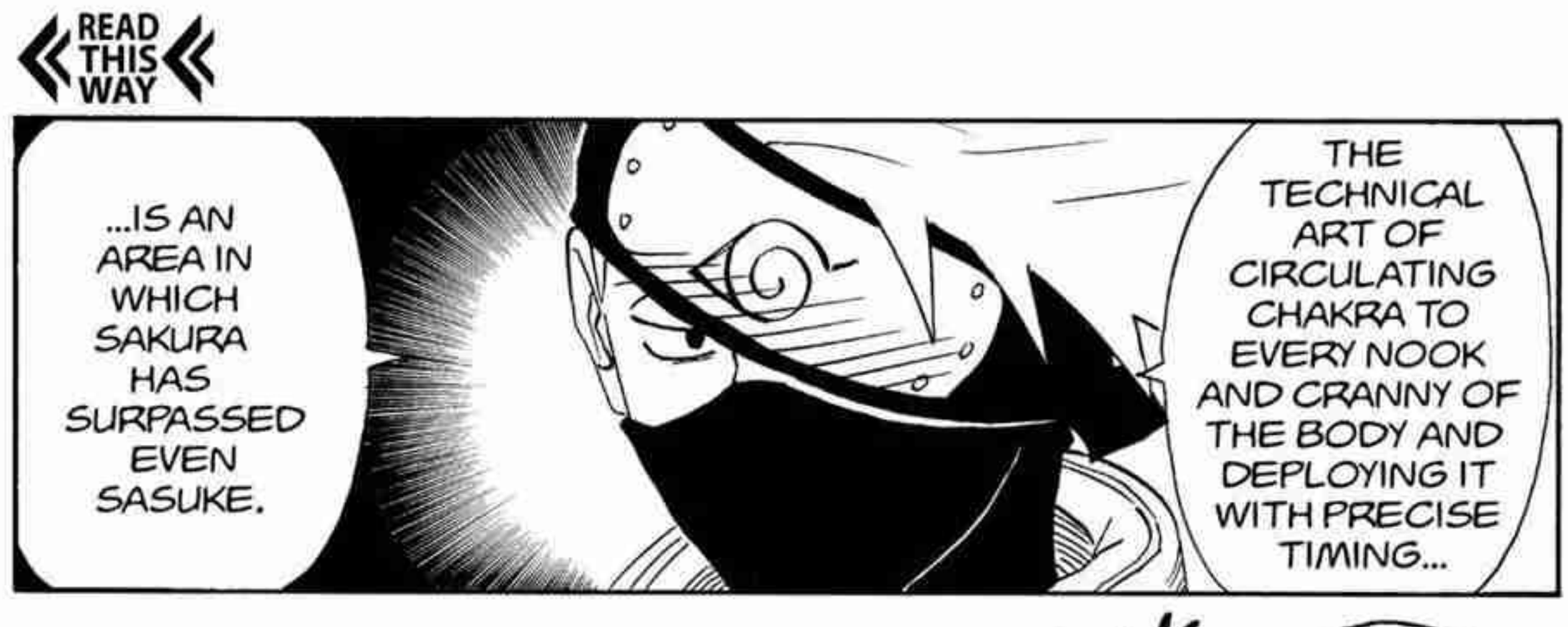


SHF

...
UH... YEAH.

EVEN BETTER THAN ME?!

SAKURA IS A SOLID CONTENDER. HER MASTERY OF THE FUNDAMENTAL TECHNIQUES FOR THE UTILIZATION OF CHAKRA IS DEFINITELY THE BEST AMONG THE ROOKIES.
LOOK AT SAKURA GO! SHE'S AWESOME!


READ THIS WAY
...IS AN AREA IN WHICH SAKURA HAS SURPASSED EVEN SASUKE.
THE TECHNICAL ART OF CIRCULATING CHAKRA TO EVERY NOOK AND CRANNY OF THE BODY AND DEPLOYING IT WITH PRECISE TIMING...

...IS A PLEASURE!
OH, SAKURA... JUST WATCHING YOU MOVE...

...HAS BEEN SUPERB.
TAK
FROM THE BEGINNING, HER MASTERY OF CHAKRA MANIPULATION ...

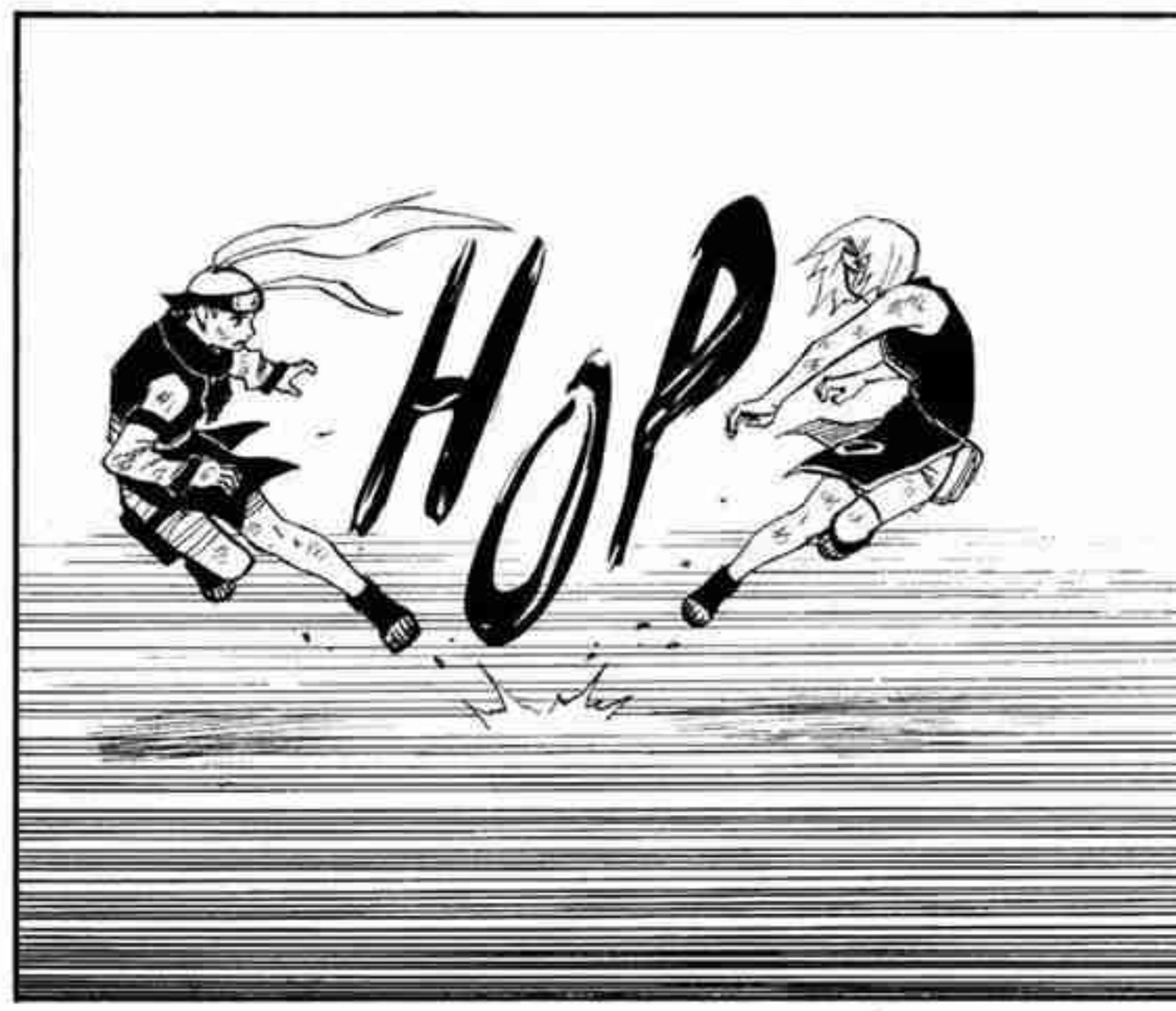
SMAK

TAK

GRRR

KLAT

KLAT

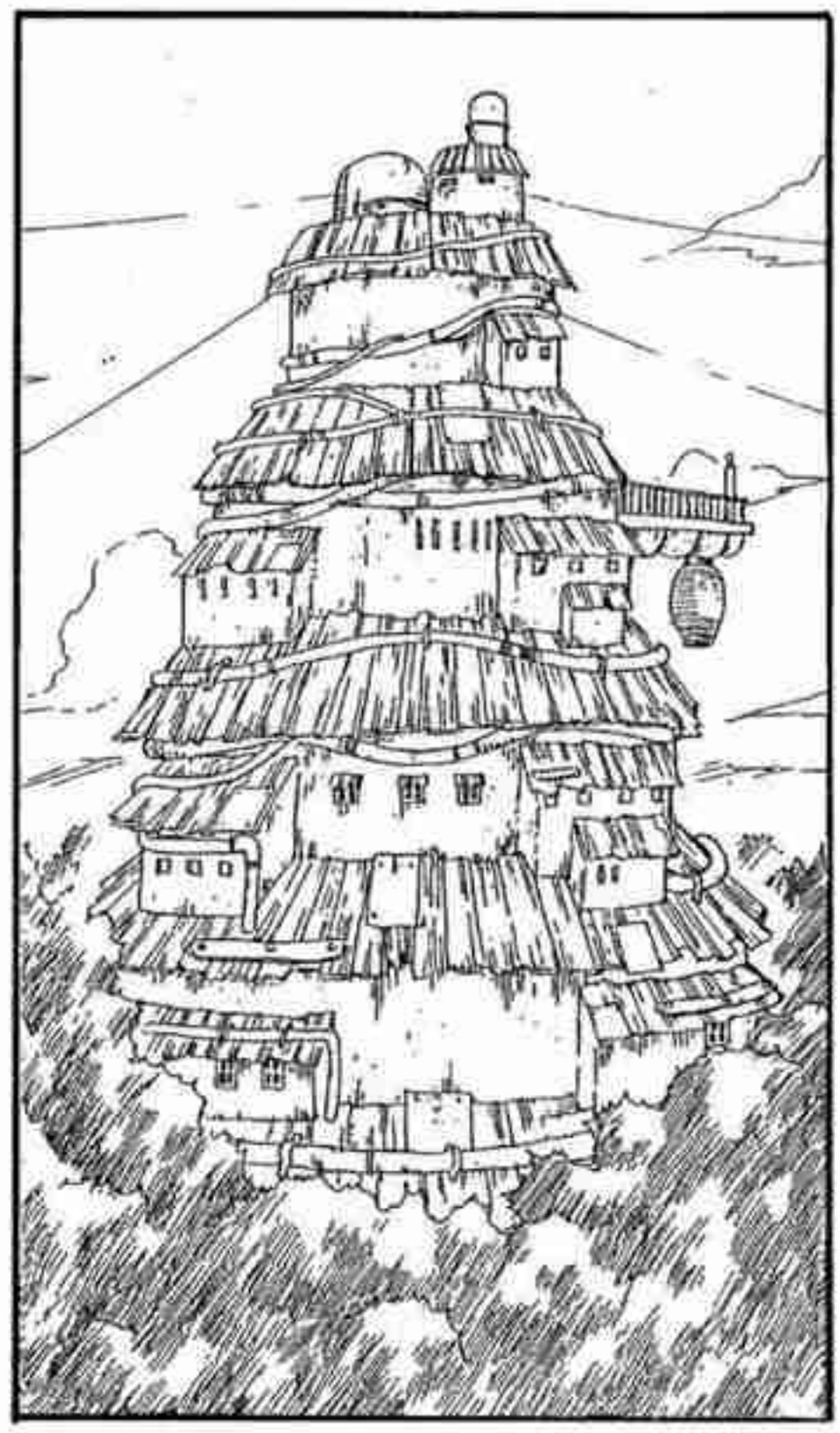

HOP

CHINNNG

FUG

IT LOOKS LIKE A FAIR FIGHT... ONE THAT COULD DRAG ON AND ON.
BUT HER OPPONENT IS ALSO FAR ABOVE THE NORM...

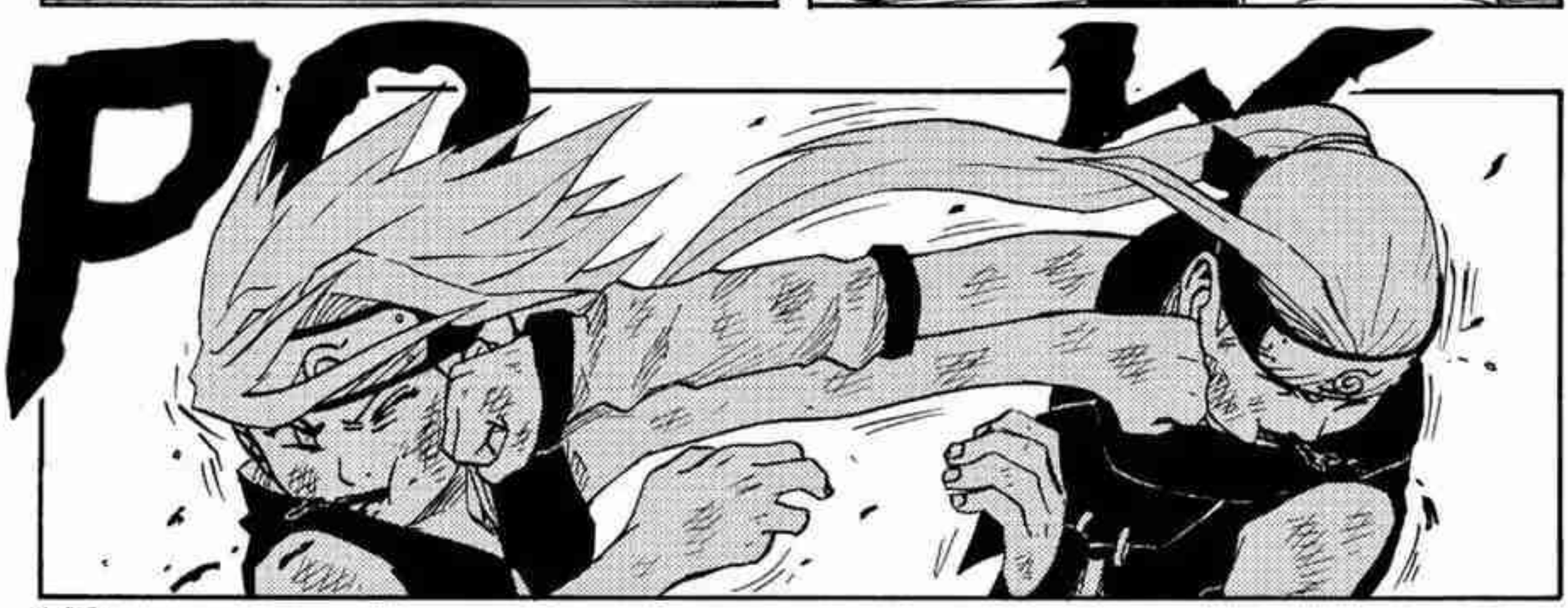
WHOP
WHOP

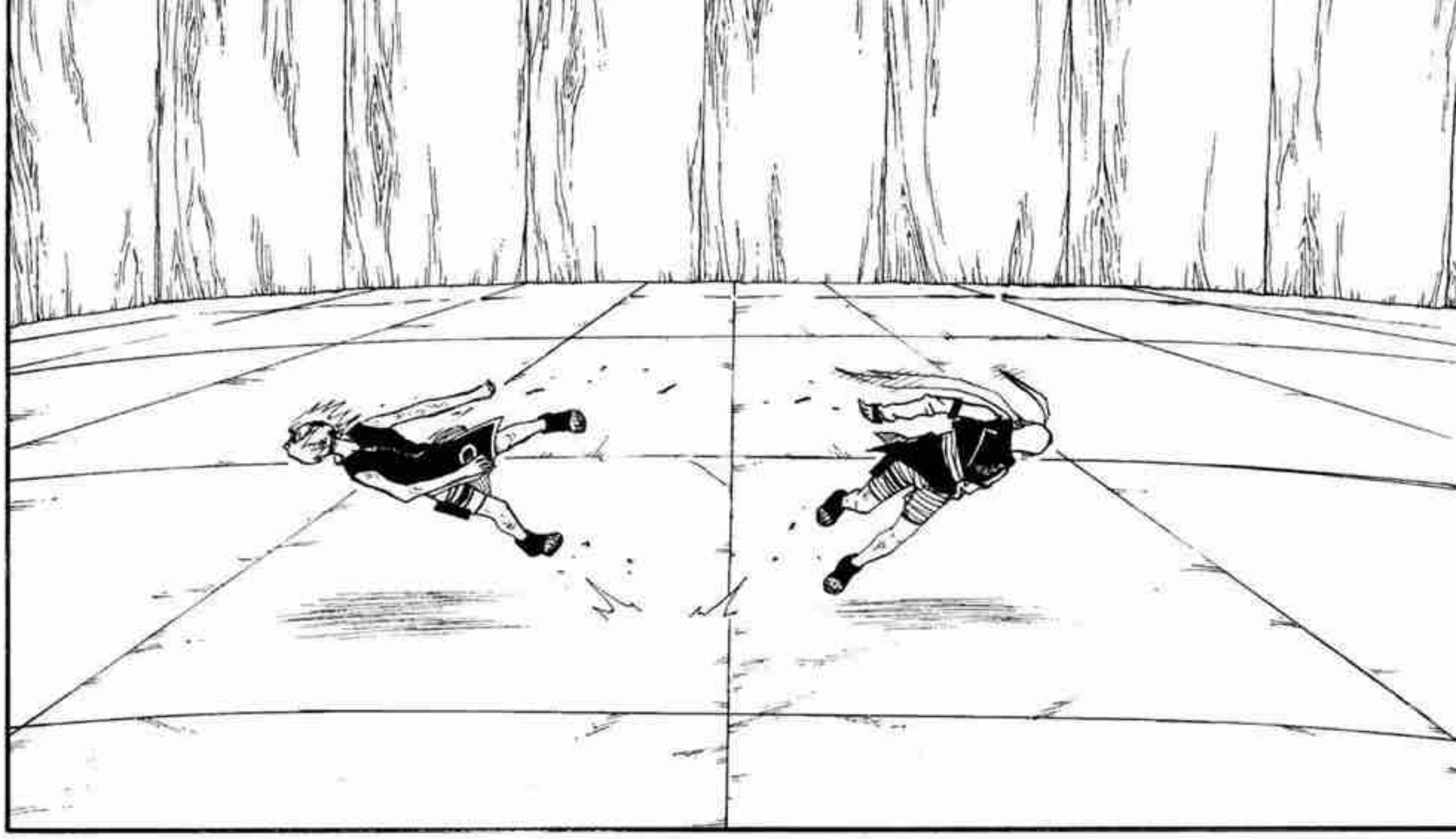


HUF
HUF
SHF
HUF
SHE WAS SUCH A BABY... WHEN DID SHE TURN SO TOUGH?!

SHF
YOU...!

I CAN!
I CAN DO THIS!
SHF


POW



THE WAY THEY'RE GOING, THIS COULD LAST FOREVER.
WHOA!

SKDDD

THEY'VE BEEN GOING AT IT FOR AT LEAST 10 MINUTES.
IT'S TAKING QUITE A WHILE...

HUF
HUF
HUF
UHN...
HUF
HUF

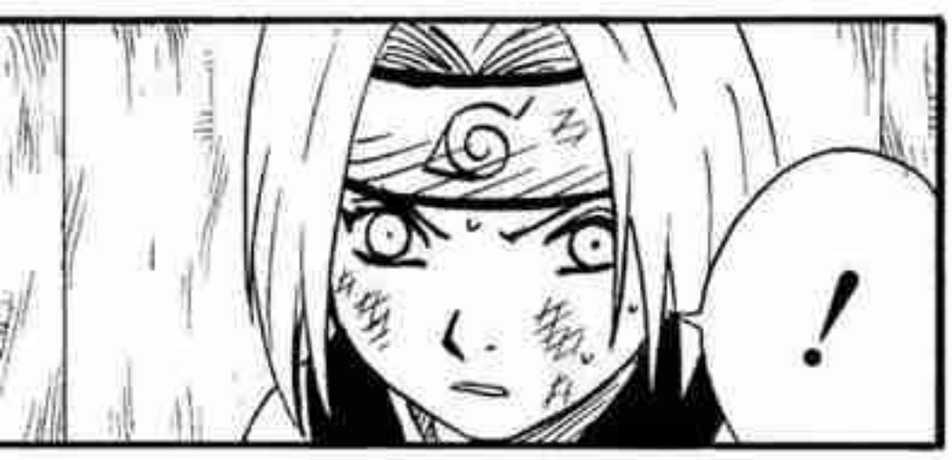
HUF
HUF
HUF
HUF

YOU'RE RIGHT. THE MAGNITUDE OF YOUR OBSESSION WITH YOUR LONG, FLOWING HAIR AND SUPERFICIAL APPEARANCES IS PEERLESS...
HMPH ...
I'M JUST NO MATCH FOR YOU!

YOU CAN'T BE MY EQUAL!
IT'S UNTHINKABLE!!

YOU'VE GONE TOO FAR!
MAKING FUN OF ME?!
CLENCH

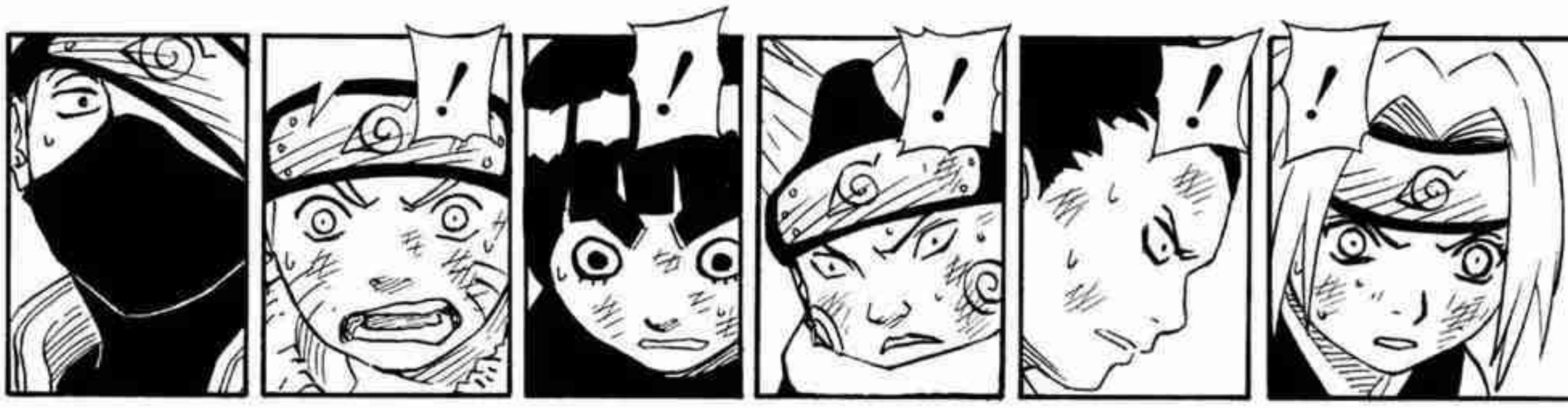
GASP


!

SHE'S FALLING RIGHT INTO SAKURA'S TRAP.
INO'S AN IDIOT, LETTING SAKURA'S WORDS GET TO HER LIKE THAT!
I DON'T LIKE SEEING INO THIS WAY!

SLPP
SHHF

SLASH

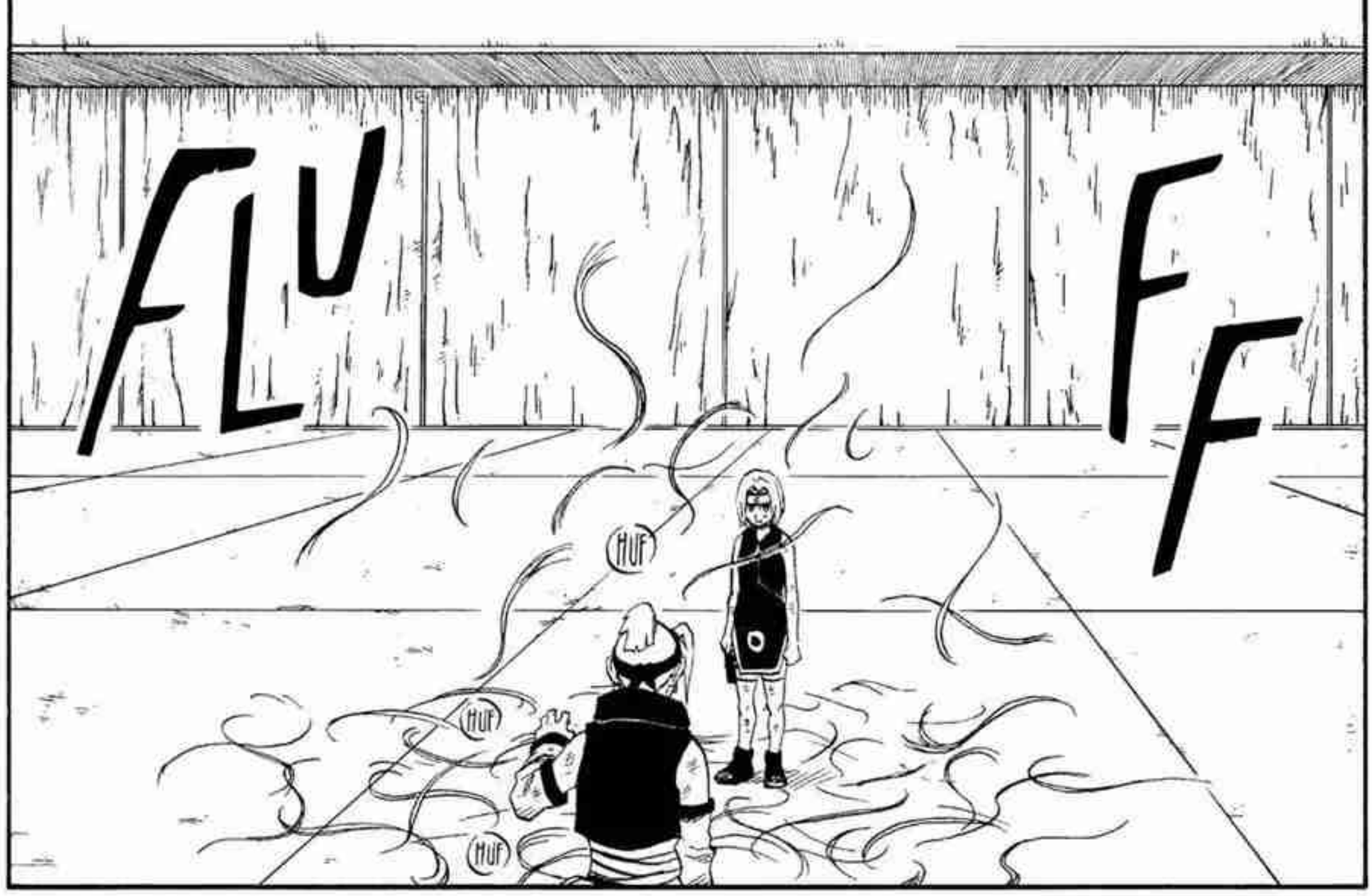


FL
THIS IS NOTHING!!
IP

YAAAGH!!
CLENCH

HA HA... YOU FOOL!

OH, MAN... SHE'S COMPLETELY LOST IT!


FLUSH
HUF
HUF
HUF

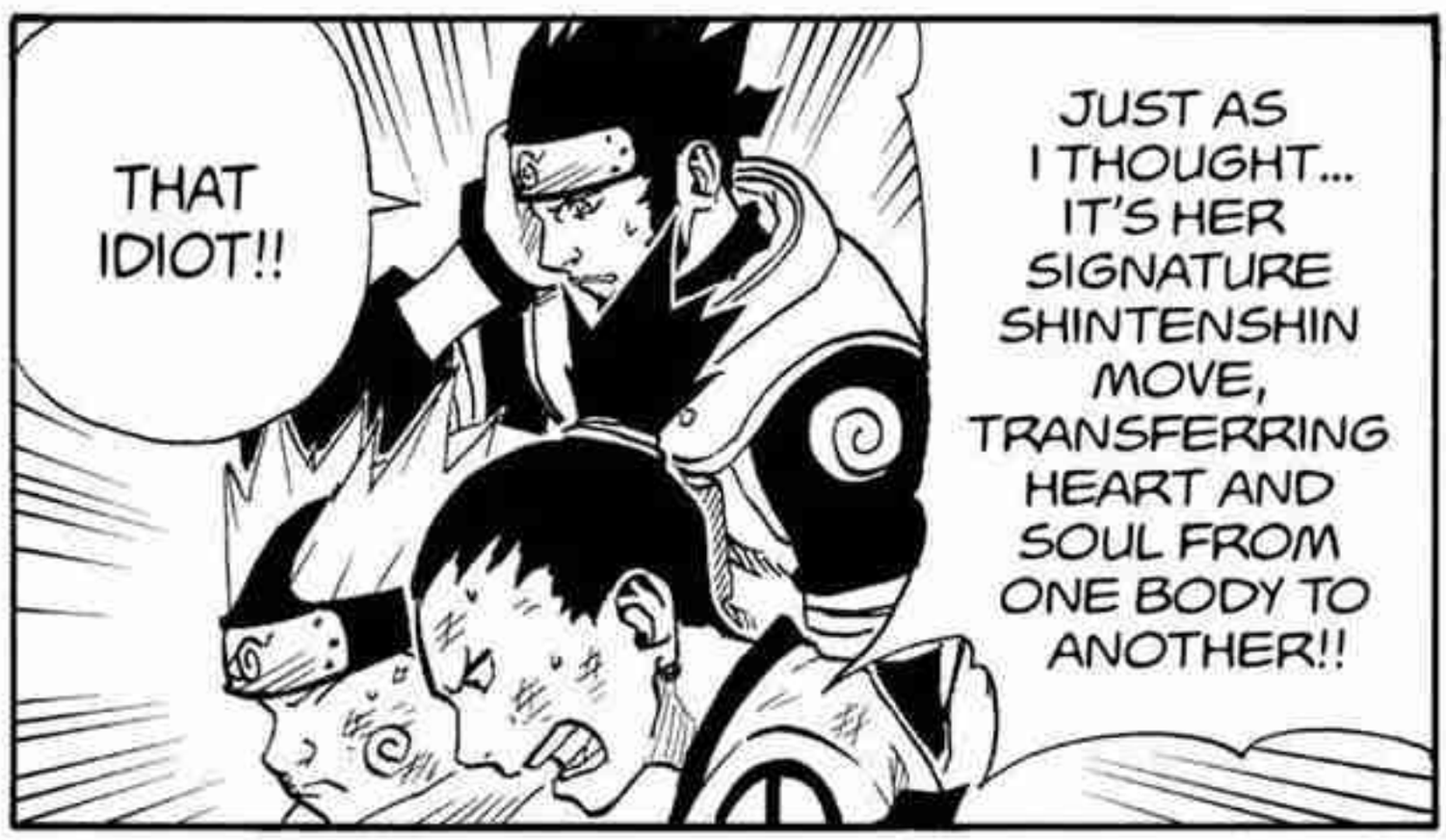
I'M GONNA MAKE YOUR LIPS SAY, "I GIVE UP"!
THIS ENDS NOW.
FW
UP

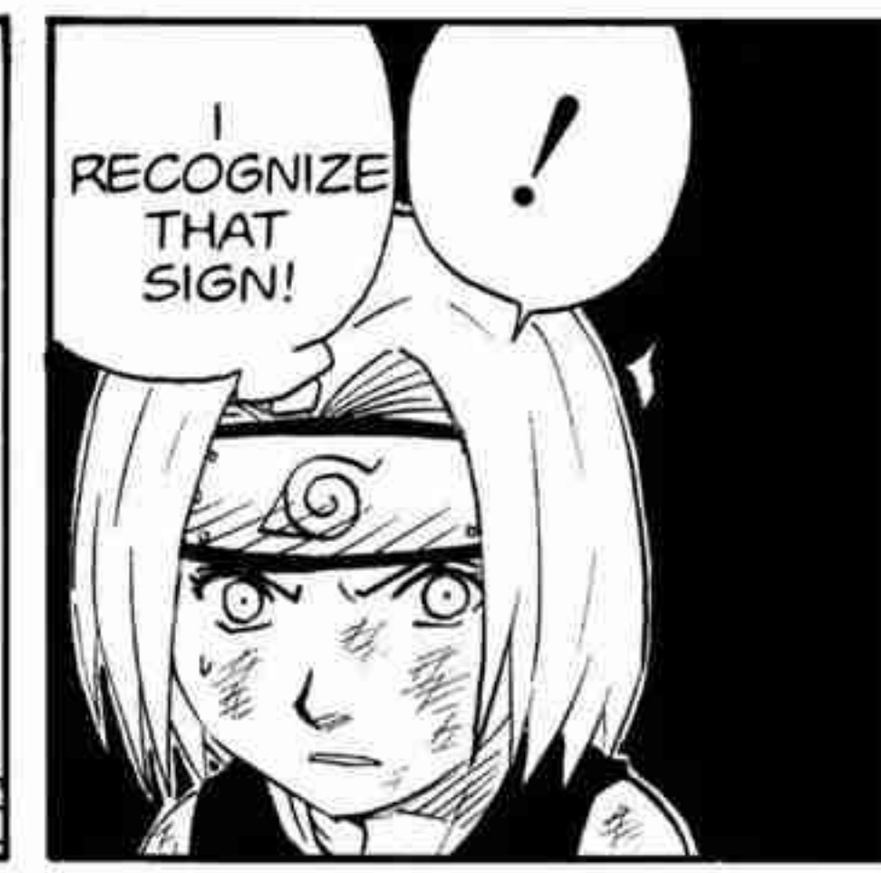
SH-SHE'S SCARY...
...

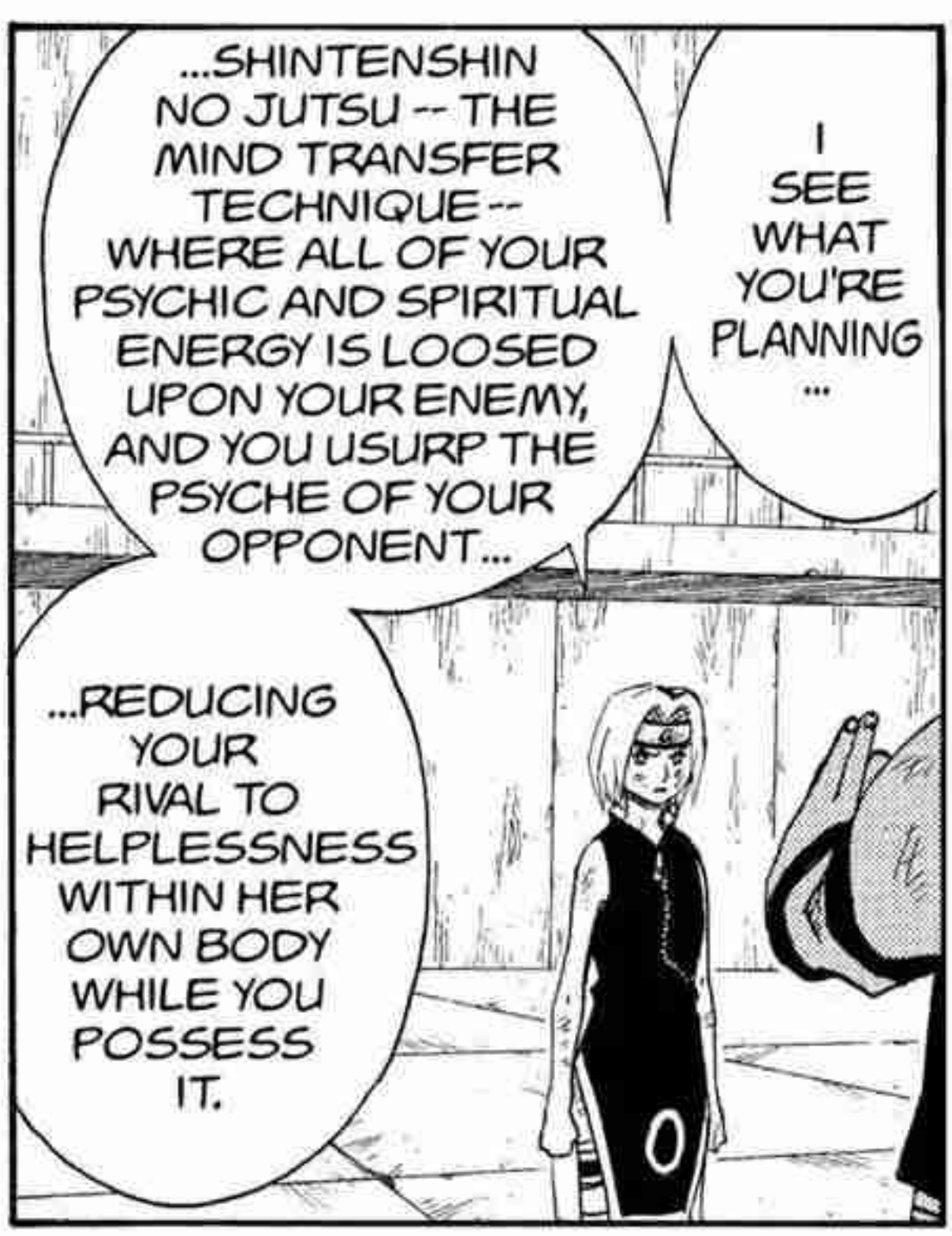
SSH
SHE'S THINKING ABOUT IT...
...!

DON'T TELL ME... SHE COULDN'T MEAN...
...!

FIN UP


THAT IDIOT!!
JUST AS I THOUGHT... IT'S HER SIGNATURE SHINTENSHIN MOVE, TRANSFERRING HEART AND SOUL FROM ONE BODY TO ANOTHER!!


I RECOGNIZE THAT SIGN!
!


...SHINTENSHIN NO JUTSU -- THE MIND TRANSFER TECHNIQUE -- WHERE ALL OF YOUR PSYCHIC AND SPIRITUAL ENERGY IS LOOSED UPON YOUR ENEMY, AND YOU USURP THE PSYCHE OF YOUR OPPONENT...
I SEE WHAT YOU'RE PLANNING ...
...REDUCING YOUR RIVAL TO HELPLESSNESS WITHIN HER OWN BODY WHILE YOU POSSESS IT.

...YOU'RE WASTING YOUR TIME!
I UNDERSTAND YOUR IMPATIENCE, BUT...
HEH...
WE'LL SEE ABOUT THAT!!
HMPH!

SECONDLY, EVEN IF THAT PACKET OF MENTAL ENERGY SHOULD MISS ITS TARGET...

...IT IS STILL UNABLE TO RETURN TO THE ATTACKER'S BODY FOR SEVERAL MINUTES...

...THAT BOLT OF MENTAL ENERGY CAN ONLY MOVE ALONG A DIRECT PATH...

BUT THAT FORMIDABLE ART HAS A FEW INHERENT FLAWS. FIRST OF ALL...

...AND IT MOVES VERY SLOWLY.

...VULNERABLE AS A RAG DOLL.

AND DURING THAT TIME, YOUR OWN BODY REMAINS LIMP, HELPLESS...

AND IF INO TRIES HER ART AND FAILS, SAKURA WILL BE ABLE TO PUNISH INO'S DEFENSELESS BODY UNTIL INO'S SPIRIT IS ABLE TO RETURN.

SAKURA'S IN NO DANGER AS LONG AS SHE PRESENTS A MOVING TARGET.

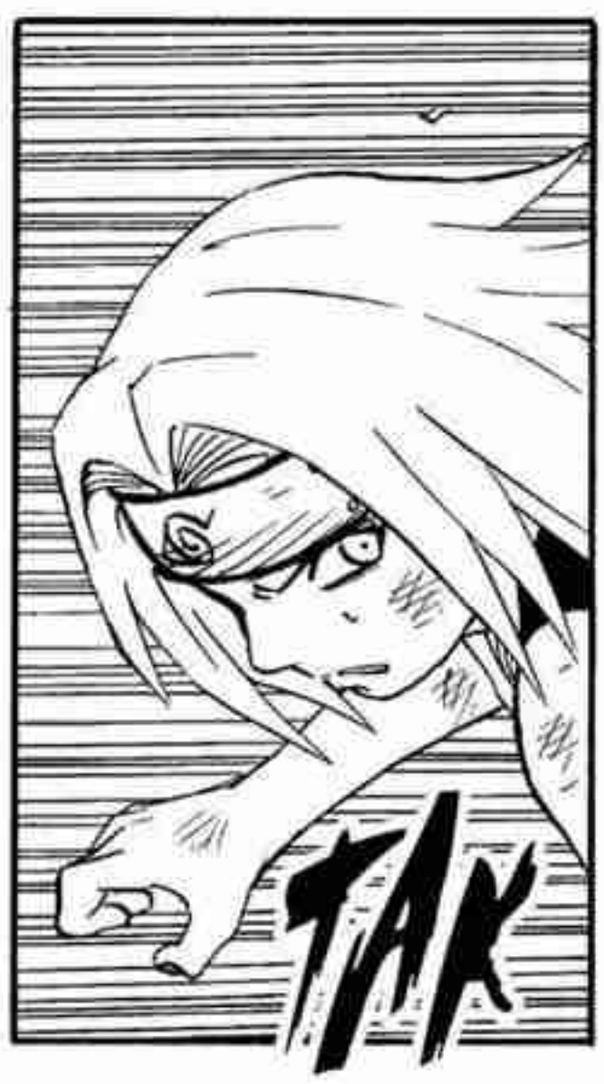
IF IT COMES TO THAT, HAYATE WILL HAVE TO STOP THE MATCH.

THE SHINTENSHIN IS AN UNPARALLELED TOOL FOR ESPIONAGE AND INFILTRATION, BUT...

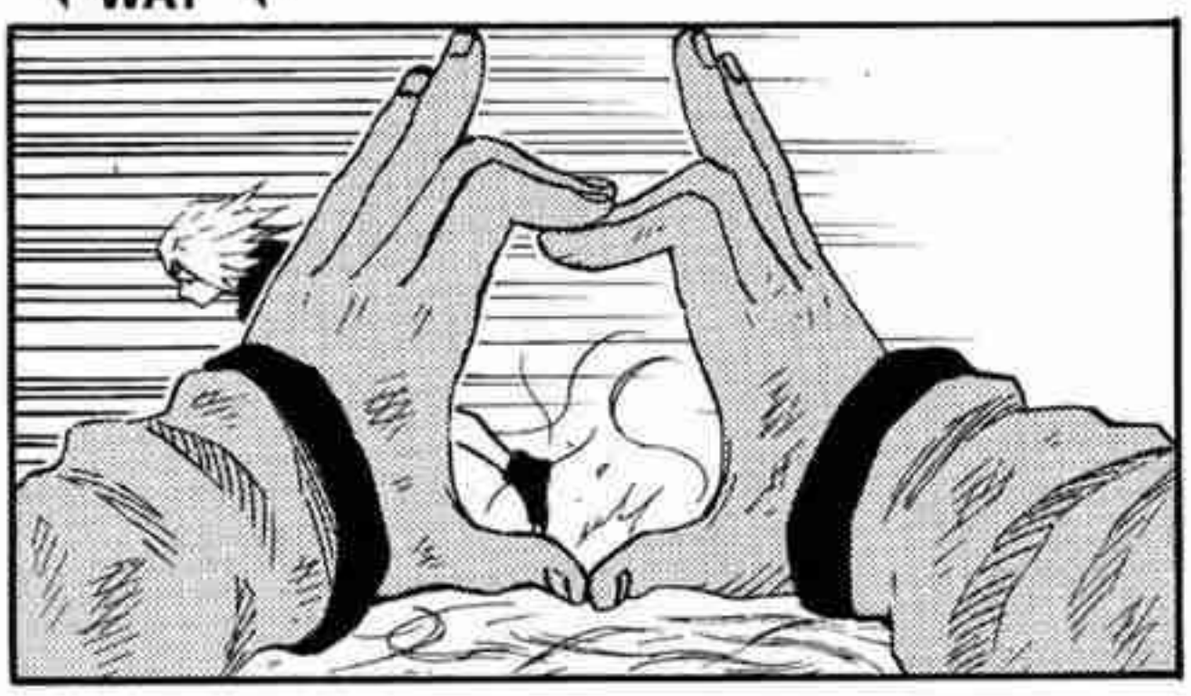
...USING IT IN A HEADS-UP FIGHT IS SUICIDE.

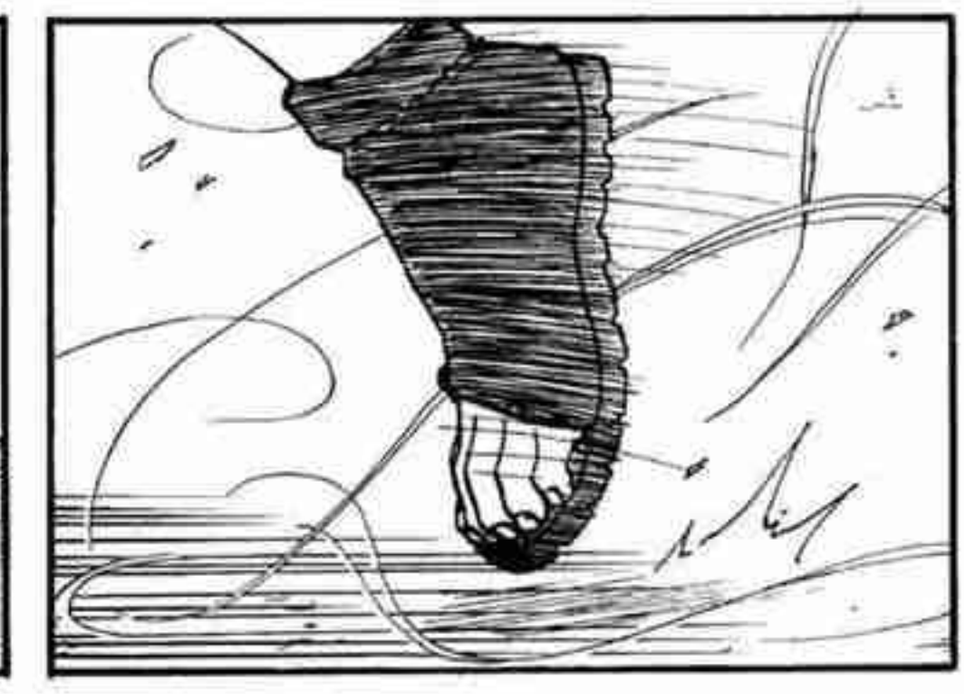
NO ONE KNOWS WHAT WILL HAPPEN HERE UNTIL I GIVE IT A TRY!

WHAT OF IT?!



READ
THIS
WAY





NO, YOU FOOL--!!
!!
!

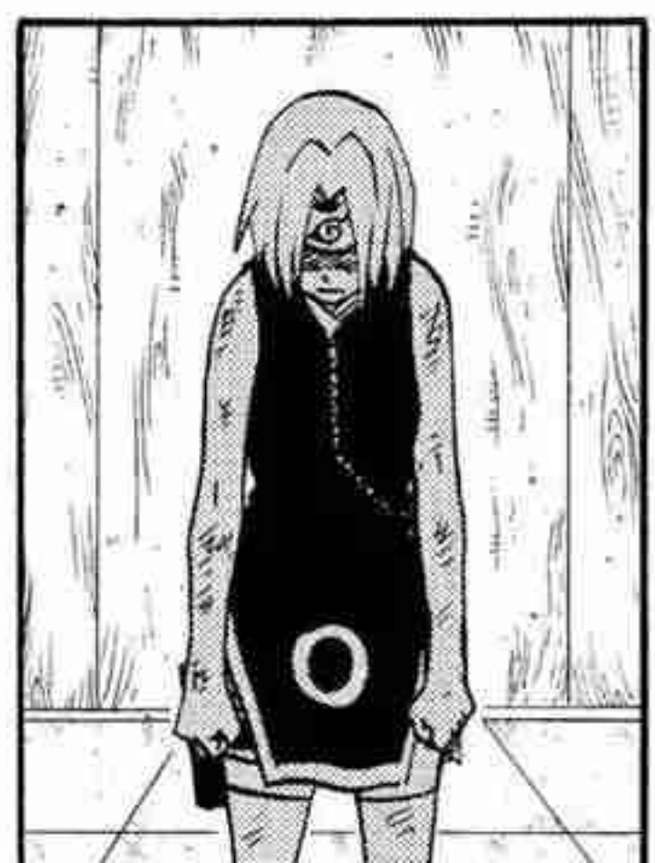
?!
!

...SHINTENSHIN NO JUTSU!!
NINJA ART...

GRR
RR

...

YOU LOSE...
HEH



...WHO'S WHO?
BLINK
ULP!

...INO!

GUESS YOU'RE DONE.

...

I CAN'T BELIEVE SHE ACTUALLY TRIED IT.

I GUESS IT'S ALL OVER NOW...

GOTCHA, SAKURA!

!

!!

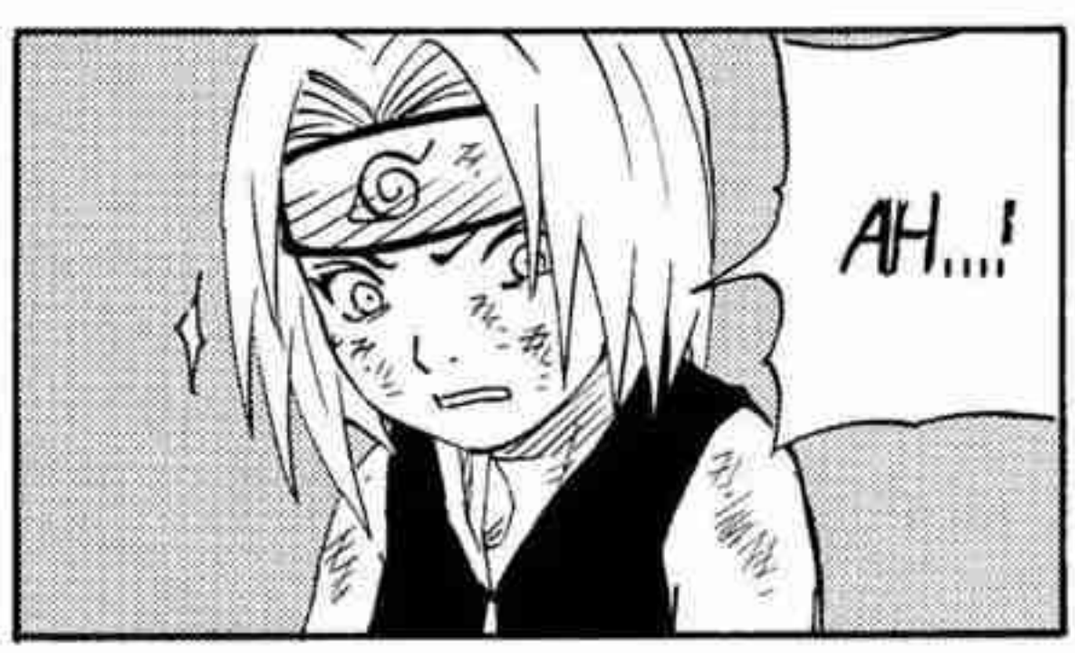
TH-THIS IS--!

HUNH?

HEH...
I SET A TRAP... AND YOU FELL FOR IT. ♡

...YOU DON'T MEAN--!

I MADE A LIVING ROPE BY RUNNING CHAKRA THROUGH MY OWN CUT HAIR.
CAN'T MOVE AT ALL, CAN YOU?


AH...!

YOU ZIGGED, YOU ZAGGED... AND YOU FELL RIGHT INTO IT!
YEP. THE HAND SIGNS I MADE EARLIER WERE JUST A DISTRACTION... TO KEEP YOU FROM SEEING THE REAL TRAP.

ON
NG
AND NOW THAT I'VE GOT YOU WHERE I WANT YOU...
...I CAN TAKE UP OCCUPANCY... AND MAKE YOU SURRENDER.

TAK
SKF

I THINK THE ODDS ARE 100% I'M GONNA HIT MY TARGET, DON'T YOU THINK?
FWUP

THAT NUT... MAKING HERSELF LOOK LIKE A LOSER SO SHE COULD WIN!

LOOKS LIKE IT!

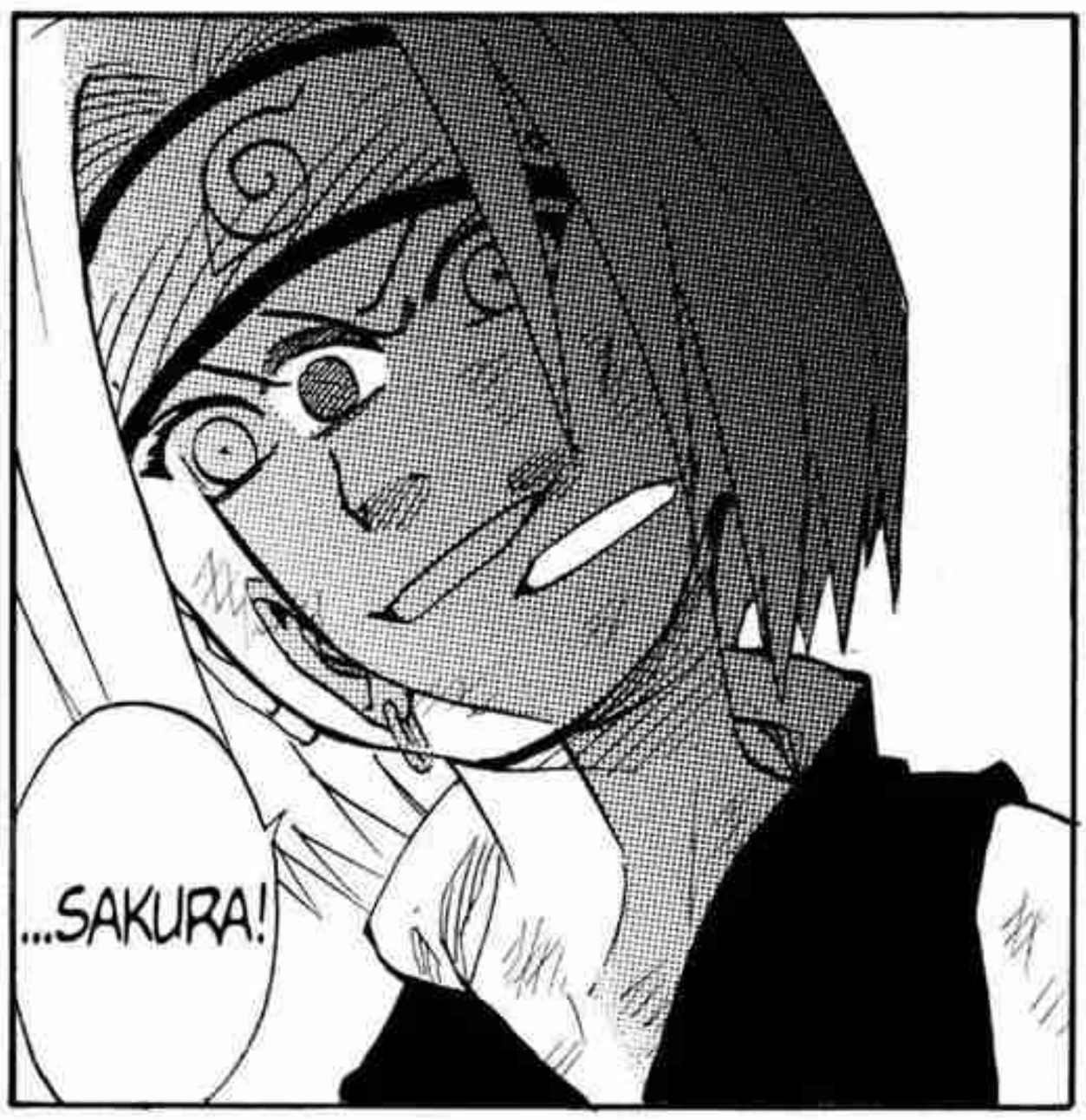
AND SO...

I CAN'T MOVE...!
UNH...

OW!! SHINTENSHIN NO JUTSU!!

BLINK

SLUMP



TO BE CONTINUED IN NARUTO VOL. 9!